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An Appreciative Inquiry of young people's transition into Alternative Provision

Sarah Kate Louise Martineau

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accordance with the requirements for award of the
degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in the
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Abstract

Alternative provision (AP) refers to education provided to those of compulsory school age who are not receiving suitable schooling from mainstream or special settings, usually because of exclusion or illness. With exclusion rates increasing and a growing number of young people attending AP (HCEC, 2018), there has been a recent push to improve standards within AP (DfE, 2018). This thesis uses an Appreciative Inquiry methodology to explore young people's experiences of transitioning into AP and ways in which this might be improved. The research combines data from 8 student interviews with data from 2 AP staff focus groups, to inform the *Discovery*, *Dream* and *Design* phases of the Appreciative Inquiry cycle. Data has been analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and used to inform a final focus group in which staff considered the *Design* of how they might change practice within their setting. As documented in a range of studies exploring AP (DfE, 2017; Hart, 2013; Jalali & Morgan, 2018), the current research emphasises the significance of relationships with staff in supporting students attending AP. In discussion of the findings, connections are made between the development of these relationships and staff utilising skills associated with therapeutic relationships (Rogers, 1962) and attachment-based interactions (Hughes, 2015). This is suggested to be further reinforced by the AP offering a nurturing environment, enabling a feeling of respect and maturity through the use of flexible rules. The research proposes that young people perceiving the move into AP as a "fresh start" allows them to develop new identities within the AP setting. Issues such as how staff convey their expectations of young people transitioning into AP are explored and the findings suggest that the transition into AP can be challenging when students have negative pre-existing relationships with other students.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed:

Date:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This thesis uses the term Alternative Provision (AP) throughout and follows the definition of AP as,

“education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive a suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils in a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour” (DfE, 2013, p.3).

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore young people’s experiences of transitioning into AP, and ways in which such experiences might be improved. An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology was selected to investigate the topic, with students and staff from one AP, split across two sites. This involved 8 student interviews, and 2 focus groups with a total of 13 AP staff, to explore the *Discovery* and *Dream* phases of the AI cycle. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model of thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and this was then shared with 10 staff in a final focus group to inform the *Design* phase. This involved staff using findings from the research to make an action plan for changing practice within their own setting.

Key considerations for stakeholders are made, alongside potential implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs).

1.2 Research origins

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I encountered numerous young people who had experienced school exclusion, many of whom were subsequently referred to AP. I also came across many students “at-risk” of permanent exclusion, for whom placements within AP were recommended.

Through my own practice, I observed that the majority of those offered placements within AP, tended to stay there for the remainder of their compulsory schooling, seemingly with no intention from the school or LA that they would return to mainstream settings. When sitting on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Panel, I

was also aware that many students with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were receiving their education in AP.

AP was not something I had been familiar with prior to my training and I was surprised at how many students I came across who attended this type of provision. I wanted to learn more about AP and so began to research the topic.

1.3 Rationale for the current research

My initial reading informed me that young people with SEN are over-represented within AP (Taylor, 2012), and that the quality of education offered by AP, has been scrutinised in numerous Governmental papers and reviews (Ofsted, 2011, 2016).

Because of the poor outcomes many young people attending AP achieve (DCSF, 2008), and as AP is often considered to be a short-term solution (Thomson, 2017), there appears to have been a push within the literature into looking at re-integration from AP back into mainstream settings. However, much of the research suggests that re-integration, particularly for those in Years 10 and 11, is unsuccessful (DfE, 2003) and, as I had observed in my own work, that many young people remain in AP for a significant length of time (Thomson, 2017). From my perspective as a researcher and TEP, it therefore seemed important to learn more about young people's experiences of attending AP.

Whilst research indicated that young people valued their time in AP (Section 2.5.1), it became clear that little was known about their transition into AP, other than it usually took place very quickly and was often ill-prepared (Ofsted, 2016). It also emerged that although relationships with staff had been highlighted in numerous studies, staff had rarely been asked for their perspectives. This inspired the first research question defined within this dissertation:

- 1) What factors do students and staff perceive as working well in supporting young people's transition into AP?

The second question was motivated by my desire to make sure that the research had some impact, and was further influenced my choice of methodology, AI. As such the second research question was:

2) What can we learn from young people and staff's experiences to adapt future transition planning within an AP?

Further information about the methodology and choice of research questions will be provided in Chapter 3.

1.4 Definitions and terminology

Key terms such as AP are defined within the literature review in Chapter 2.

Within this section, I would like to briefly discuss definitions of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), and Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD), as research indicates the majority of young people attending AP have been labelled as having needs in these areas (HCEC, 2018). Hence, lots of the research described within the literature review uses this terminology.

EBD have been defined as applying to,

“...a broad range of young people – preponderantly boys – with a very wide spectrum of needs, from those with short term emotional difficulties to those with extremely challenging behaviour or serious psychological difficulties...at great risk of under-achievement, educationally and in their personal development. They can also disrupt the education of others.” (DfEE, 1997, p. 78).

Similarly, BESD, as first used within the SEN code of Practice 2001, refers to those,

“...who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs.” (DfES, 2001, p.87)

These definitions have now been replaced with the term SEMH, which was introduced in the 2014 revision of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE/DfH, 2014). Young people experiencing SEMH needs are defined as those who are,

“withdrawn or isolated...displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour...have underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders...attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.” (DfE/DfH, 2014, p.98)

The removal of the word behaviour from the title, suggests that behavioural difficulties are now seen as symptomatic, rather than a SEN in themselves.

Labelling such as this has been criticised for pathologising individuals and ignoring other factors such as the environment (Ho, 2004). Kershaw and Sonuga-Barke (1998), suggest that labels such as EBD serve to treat young people as a homogenous group, thus ignoring individual needs. Furthermore, research has found that young people negatively view such definitions (Sheffield and Morgan, 2017). I have therefore endeavoured to be careful in my choice of language when referring to these needs throughout this dissertation.

Both “BESD” and “SEMH” have been used in the writing of this research, depending on how they were defined within the original paper or research which I am discussing at the time.

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

This research is presented within chapters to provide structure and clarity. The present chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the research, outlining the significance of the topic, the study’s origins, and describes the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 details the literature review, presenting definitions of AP, a description of those who typically attend AP, and offering an overview of the political context. The chapter goes on to critically evaluate current academic literature, relevant to the current research, exploring what is already known about what makes AP effective and young people’s experiences of attending AP. Questions emerging from the literature are presented alongside considerations as to the relevance of the topic for Educational Psychologists (EPs).

Chapter 3 then moves on to clarify the specific research questions and aims of this dissertation. The philosophical positioning of this research, as well as a description of the methodological approach and research methods used. A rationale for the

chosen approach is given, together with ethical considerations of conducting the research.

Subsequently, findings drawn from thematic analysis are detailed in Chapter 4. Themes and sub-themes are presented within thematic maps and are then described in reference to participant quotations.

Chapter 5 then describes how the findings address the research questions. Findings are further analysed and discussed in relation to the relevant literature. Key considerations for stakeholders and potential implications for EPs are given, in addition to suggestions for future research.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, offers a critical evaluation of the research, as well as a reflective account of the research process.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter offers a definition of the term “alternative provision” (AP), exploring key Government policy and academic research relating to this field. It then describes characteristics of young people attending AP within England, exploring recent data on school exclusion statistics.

Details of systematic literature searches, exploring current academic research into AP and related areas will be given, providing a rationale for the current study. A critical exploration of relevant literature within the field is provided, and finally the chapter ends with questions emerging from the literature review process.

2.1 Defining “Alternative Provision”

AP, also referred to as “alternative education”, “alternative education provision” or “education other than at school”, is a term used to describe education for students outside of mainstream or special schools. AP can be established by public, voluntary or private sectors, as well as by independent schools, colleges and pupil referral units (PRUs) (Ofsted, 2011).

AP has been defined as,

“education for children and young people who are unable to be provided for in mainstream or in a special school...who have been permanently excluded from school or who are otherwise without a school place...(AP) is also used by schools for pupils who remain on the school roll, but who need specialist help with learning, behavioural or other difficulties.” (DCSF, 2008, pp.10-11).

Models of AP vary, with some young people attending a single AP full-time, some attending a bespoke package from a range of providers, and others attending AP alongside mainstream education. Arrangements such as these have been criticised for their lack of consistency and efficacy (Ofsted, 2011; Gazeley et al. 2013), with reports acknowledging that many young people attending AP miss out on key learning in areas of Maths and English, and not always being provided with a “sufficiently broad and challenging curriculum” (Tate and Greatbatch, 2017, pp.11).

As well as covering the National Curriculum, AP placements can be vocational (for example in construction or childcare), focussed on personal development, in terms of building self-confidence, self-management and safety, or can be music and arts

related. Other AP includes therapeutic provision, such as animal care, with additional focus on personal and vocational development (Ofsted, 2011).

Attendance at AP has a significant cost, with Ofsted (2011) finding that schools were charged between £20 and £123 per day, meaning that schools spent between £5000 and £86000 a year on AP, often not including additional costs such as staffing and transport.

According to Ofsted (2011), AP has been used to:

- Support challenging and vulnerable students in achieving examination success and moving on to Post 16 options
- Improve attendance and behaviour by building on students' own interests and increasing motivation for learning
- Broaden young people's experiences and styles of learning
- Reduce the impact on other young people in school
- Avoid permanent exclusion

Students can be referred to AP through a range of pathways. Some will be placed in AP by their school, whereas other placements are identified by the Local Authority (LA). LA's are responsible for the identification of an alternative placement, which could include AP, for all children who have been permanently excluded. Pathways vary between LAs, with some schools referring directly to AP themselves, and others going through a Fair Access Panel (HCEC, 2018).

2.2 Political context

Permanent exclusion was first legislated within the 1986 Education Act, in sections 23-27, and it was not until the 1996 Education Act, that LAs were required to provide AP for students who had been given an exclusion from school, using Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or other arrangements. Throughout the 1990's, concerns began to grow around the frequency of permanent exclusions, with studies beginning to reveal that those who had been permanently excluded, were often waiting to be offered an AP for around 3 months, and 50% were found to be not in education, employment or training (NEET,) two years following the exclusion (DfE, 2003). Since this time, increased use of AP is said to have stemmed from a Governmental focus on reducing permanent exclusions and has been used as a strategy for preventing exclusions by re-engaging students in their education (Gazeley, Marrable, Brown & Boddy, 2013). Current exclusion statistics are presented in Section 2.4.

There has also been an increasing emphasis on exploring the outcomes of students attending AP. Again, this stems from a shift in political agenda, as evidenced in the “DfE strategy 2015-2020” which focuses heavily on improving outcomes for all (DfE, 2016b).

In one of the first studies relating to outcomes for permanently excluded young people attending AP, the DfE (2003) demonstrated that re-integration into mainstream schools frequently failed. Access to AP was found to be linked to availability, “rather than a careful matching of a young person’s needs to appropriate provision” (DfE, 2003, vi). The study also highlighted the potential for skilled staff to support successful outcomes for this group of young people, with students reporting that relationships with staff in AP were more positive than they had been with staff from the excluding school.

Since this time there have been numerous Government reviews and papers aimed at improving and evaluating the use of AP, all with recurring themes as shown in Appendix 1. A discussion of these papers is presented below.

In 2007, Ofsted produced a report on establishing successful practice within PRUs, a form of AP. They recommended that successful settings had a clear purpose, focusing on preparing young people for their next stage of life and on improving individual and academic skills. However, it was also suggested that many settings received insufficient information from previous schools, and that monitoring of progress upon joining the PRU was inadequate. Similar findings were produced in later Ofsted reviews in 2011 and 2016. Often referrals made with inadequate information led to inappropriate identification of AP placements (DfE, 2012). Insufficient information being given to AP settings about individual’s SEN and abilities in Maths and Literacy, also meant that young people were expected to complete inappropriate tasks when they first arrived in the AP (Ofsted, 2011). More recently the DfE (2017) has proposed that AP settings should assess young people’s needs themselves as part of a “fresh-start approach”.

Concerns around the outcomes of young people attending AP began to develop following the DCSF (2008) Back on track project. This report recommended that AP should offer a core educational entitlement, whilst taking an individual approach, building on the young person’s skills and strengths. Following growing concern that those attending AP did not achieve “meaningful qualifications”, it was decided that the performance of those attending AP would be included in school performance tables, as an incentive to ensure careful monitoring and review of such provision.

Statistics highlighted by the DfE (2011), later suggested that only 1.4% of those attending AP attained a minimum of five GCSEs at grade A*-C, whereas 53.4% of young people achieved this in mainstream schools. It was also found that not all students attending AP secured “positive destinations” Post-16 (DfE, 2012). Positive destinations referred to employment, apprenticeships and further education.

In 2013, the DfE produced statutory guidance on the use of AP. This stated that LAs would be responsible for finding an appropriate placement for permanently excluded students, and that school governing bodies would be responsible for arranging full-time education from the 6th day of any fixed-term exclusion. It recommended that AP should support in the identification of individual needs and should enable all young people to achieve equivalent qualifications and accreditation. This was further reinforced within the SEND: Code of Practice (DfE/DfH, 2015), which proposed that AP should provide an education equivalent to that offered by mainstream schools. More recently, it has been recognised that there is conflicting opinion regarding the AP curriculum, with some proposing that this should focus on academic or vocational development, and others advising that there needs to be more emphasis on the advancement of skills and behaviours needed for learning (DfE, 2017).

As demonstrated in Appendix 1, many Government reviews have highlighted that young people value learning in AP settings and there has been a call for further evidence into what works for young people in AP (DfE, 2016). Ofsted (2011), found that students valued being treated maturely and described seeing improvements in their own motivation, learning and attendance. Similarly, the DfE (2012) found that students demonstrated improvements in self-confidence, behaviour and communication with others, generally having a more positive attitude towards their education. Finally, many of the reports emphasise the importance of staff as facilitators of young people’s success in AP (DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017).

As noted by Tate and Greatbatch (2017), there have been recent changes to the way in which AP’s are governed, with many LA PRUs becoming Academies or part of Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT). AP is also offered by Free Schools, independent schools, charities and further education colleges.

In September 2017, the Education Committee launched a further inquiry into AP, stating that:

"Students in alternative provision are far less likely to achieve good exam results, find well-paid jobs or go on to further study. Only around 1% of

young people in state alternative provision receive five good GCSEs” (UK Parliament, 20.09.2017).

The on-going inquiry seeks to determine routes into AP, the quality of teaching within AP, and information around the provision of resources for those attending AP.

An evidence session was held in the House of Commons in November 2017. This discussion highlighted that many young people attending AP are doing so on a permanent basis, rather than as a temporary placement. Again, the poor outcomes of those attending AP were emphasised,

“1% of children in alternative provision get five good GCSEs with English and maths, but 99% do not. Close to 50% are immediately not in education, employment or training in the six months after they finish their GCSEs. So we have really shocking outcomes.” (House of Commons Education Committee, oral evidence: Alternative provision, HC 342, 2017, p.3).

More recently it has been shown that 4.4% of students attending AP achieved grade 9-4 passes ¹in their English and Maths GCSE. Whilst an improvement on previous years, this compares to 63.3% for all state funded schools (DfE, 2017c).

2.3 Who attends AP?

The House of Commons Education Committee (2018) reported that there are currently

16,732 pupils who attend PRUs, AP academies or free schools and other AP, such as FE colleges. There are then a further 9,897 students who attend AP but are registered as being on roll in a mainstream setting, and 22,848 others who are educated in additional forms of AP, such as independent schools and providers that are not able to register as a school.

In their review of international literature exploring AP, Gutherson, Davies and Daszkiewicz (2011) listed a range of characteristics commonly found in young people attending AP. These are shown in the table below:

¹ GCSEs are now graded from 9-1, 9 being the highest achievable. Grade 4 is the new standard pass grade and students are expected to continue studying Maths and English until this grade is achieved. More information can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719124/Grading_new_GCSEs25.6.2018.pdf

Characteristics of young people attending AP, as identified by Gutherson et al. (2011)

- Overall poor skills in literacy and numeracy
- Histories of non-attendance
- Unacceptable behaviour leading to exclusion from school or “at-risk” status
- Looked after children
- Young people with SEN/D, particularly BESD
- Pregnant teenagers
- Young carers
- Young people with mental health difficulties
- Low socio-economic status
- Young offenders
- Those identified as gifted and talented who had disengaged
- Males from families with tradition of adults being NEET
- Some minority ethnic backgrounds

Table 1: Characteristics of those attending AP adapted from Gutherson et al. (2011).

Young people attending AP have been described as disengaged, disconnected and disaffected (Bryson 2010; Kilpatrick et al. 2007; MacDonald 2007). 47% of those attending AP are aged between 15 and 16, 72% are male and 40.8% are eligible for free school meals, compared with only 14% in state-funded mainstream settings (HCEC, 2018). A high proportion, 77.1%, also have identified SEN and a further 10.4% have a formal statement or EHCP. This compares to 14.4% and 2.8% in school settings (HCEC, 2018). These statistics suggest that male students of low socio-economic status and with SEN are over-represented within AP.

Thomson and Pennacchia (2015), expressed concern that although some groups, for example working-class girls, are more likely to disengage from education, they are often under-represented within AP. Indeed, Tate (2017), comments that a review of Ofsted inspections for AP settings revealed that all but one had more male than female students.

Factors such as exam stress and social media have been argued to negatively impact the wellbeing of many adolescents. It has been suggested that a growing awareness of student mental health needs, such as that proposed in the Government's Green Paper on mental health (2017), is further increasing the amount of young people identified as needing additional support and who cannot cope within mainstream settings, thus increasing the number of those attending AP (HCEC, 2018). Furthermore, Thomson (2017), found that whilst the majority of pupils on roll in PRUs had been there for a relatively short period of time, for those attending LA AP settings, as many as a third had been there for six consecutive years.

AP is often accessed following a permanent or fixed-term exclusion from school but can also be used by schools to improve behaviour, to provide an education for those with medical conditions, such as mental health needs which prevent them from accessing mainstream school, and as noted by the House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC, 2018, p.1) often for "less legitimate reasons", such as "off-rolling" to prevent schools being accountable for young people's Progress 8² data.

2.4 Current School Exclusion Statistics

This section explores school exclusion statistics as many young people attending AP will have been excluded prior to their placement in AP.

Research by Gill, Quilter-Pinner, & Swift (2017), suggests that certain groups, such as those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Children In Care (CIC) and those entitled to Free School Meals (FSM), are more likely to be excluded than others, and are in turn more likely to attend AP.

Whilst the number of permanent exclusions dramatically declined by nearly 50% between 2006/7 and 2012/13, there was a 40% increase between 2013 and 2016 (Gill, Quilter-Pinner, & Swift, 2017). Statistics released in July 2018 suggest that there has been a further rise in both permanent and fixed-term exclusions over the past year (DfE, 2018b). The majority of exclusions are of children in Year 9 and above and boys were three times more likely to receive an exclusion than girls in the year 2016/17

² Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 as a measure of progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school until the end of secondary school. More information can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561021/Progress_8_and_Attainment_8_how_measures_are_calculated.pdf

(DfE, 2018b). Notably, approximately 50% of all exclusions were of children described as having SEN (DfE, 2018b).

Students who face multiple school exclusions tend to be vulnerable children, experiencing a range of risk factors and disadvantages (Hart, 2013). Cook describes them as,

“the hard to reach, hard to teach, most alienated, most vulnerable and those at the end of the line – for whom nothing has worked so far”. (2005, p.90)

Gill, et al. (2017) demonstrated that students who have been excluded from school are twice as likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher. They also found that in authorities with exceptionally high levels of exclusion, young people excluded from school are most likely to end up in settings graded as “Inadequate” by Ofsted.

Burton, Bartlett and Anderson de Cuevas (2009) commented that the Education and Inspections Act of 2006, appeared to have placed an emphasis on reducing permanent exclusions, above the overall aim of providing high quality education for those experiencing SEBD. They found that due to difficulties in accessing and identifying appropriate AP, some schools had an informal strategy of not giving fixed-term exclusions for more than five days, to avoid the responsibility of identifying a full-time AP for the sixth day. Others encouraged parents to remove their children before an exclusion, or issued permanent exclusions rather than fixed-term, to allow additional time to identify an appropriate AP setting.

Halfon et al. (HCEC, 2018) heard similar suggestions from witnesses in their inquiry into AP. They found that many schools did not feel financially able to provide appropriate pastoral support, which might reduce the action of school exclusion, and that this was limiting capacity to provide early intervention and identification of need. Furthermore, they have found that some schools are intentionally avoiding formal identification of SEND, as this can make permanent exclusion more difficult.

2.5 Academic Research

Alongside the developing body of Government literature around AP, there has also been a growing interest within academic research. Much of the investigation has explored over-arching themes, such as the impact of exclusion, which has been shown to correlate with isolation and social exclusion, underachievement, susceptibility to mental health problems and involvement in illegal activities (Ball et

al., 2000, Wright et al. 2000, Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007).

In order to narrow down the available literature it was necessary to conduct a systematic literature review. The review of research literature aimed to explore the following questions which arose from early reading around the topic of AP:

- What does academic research tell us about the views and experiences of those attending AP?
- What do we already know about the views of staff working in AP as to how they support the needs of young people in these settings?
- What are the outcomes for young people attending AP?
- What does research tell us about re-integration into mainstream settings following time in AP?
- What do we know about the transition experiences of young people attending AP?

Further detail on how the review was conducted can be found in Appendix 2. A critical review of key papers discussed within this chapter can be found in Appendix 3.

2.5.1 Young people's experiences of alternative provision

In one of the first studies exploring pupil voice in relation to attending AP, Hill (1997) found that young people identified positive relationships with staff, being taught in small groups, and having greater levels of 1:1 attention, as being important factors in their experiences of success within the AP setting. Similar findings were gathered by Lloyd and O'Regan (1999), who found that girls in AP settings, appreciated AP staff taking the time to build relationships with them and being taught in small classes. This meant that they felt they could ask for help and have a deeper understanding of the topic. Both studies had small sample sizes, including only 5 young people, and so further research with larger samples was recommended.

In a much larger study, Knipe, Reynolds and Milner (2007), explored the thoughts of young people around the topic of exclusion from schools, through 15 focus groups, including 114 young people aged 11 to 16. Importantly, not all participants had direct experience of exclusion and so many were offering views based upon their knowledge of other children who had been expelled or suspended from school. The findings indicated that young people felt suspension from school was justified when

students behaved in an aggressive or violent manner, as this would have a negative impact on others in the classroom. There was also a belief that those suspended from school should be expected to complete school work so that they did not miss out and did not see the exclusion as a “holiday” (p.422). Young people thought that schools might be able to improve behaviour by advising students on accessing AP and believed that this should be provided for those excluded from school.

In a more recent study, Jalali and Morgan (2018), compared the experiences of children in a Primary AP with those attending a Secondary AP to explore children and young people’s descriptions of factors that they had found supportive in making progress, developing perceptions of their own needs, and their views on mainstream and re-integration. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 secondary age students and 8 primary students, using a timeline of the children’s educational journeys to aid discussion. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis to bring to light common themes between the age ranges and those which appeared to be distinct to either Primary or Secondary age children. The researchers found that both groups externalised their behaviour and attributed this to feeling wronged by others. Primary aged children were reported to be more likely to want to go back to mainstream school, whereas the Secondary age range were described as wanting to opt-out of this. Whilst both groups had a sense of connection to their AP “family”, the Primary aged participants maintained a connection with their mainstream setting and the Secondary age range reported feeling “inadequate” or being “outcast” from the mainstream. Both groups were also reported as viewing their presence at the AP as an opportunity for change and identified supportive factors such as calmness, increased support and a more active and personalised curriculum, as helpful in improving their behaviour. Whilst young people identified a range of supportive factors in AP, the authors concluded that,

“the act of exclusion and subsequent transfer to alternative provision is fundamentally viewed as a form of social, emotional and physical rejection from mainstream education, impacting emotional wellbeing.” (Jalali and Morgan, 2018, p.10).

Similar themes were recognised by McGregor and Mills (2012) who aimed to identify practices which support the engagement of marginalised young people attending AP. They found that despite diverse backgrounds of the participants and the range of research settings explored, key themes such as the environment,

relationships with staff, and the structure and content of learning programmes, were commonly valued by all participants. The authors emphasised that AP settings seemed to offer a positive educational experience, which allowed students to re-engage in learning and to envisage alternative hopes for the future. The AP settings were also reported to have a more relaxed approach, with greater flexibility around issues such as attendance, behaviour and uniforms. Young people identified a sense of belonging and community. As in the findings of Hill (1997) and Jalali and Morgan (2018), McGregor and Mills (2012) found that relationships with staff played a key role in young people's engagement and that young people valued the respect and understanding shown to them in AP settings. In conclusion the authors recommended that there should be greater accessibility to AP for young people, with a recognition that a person-centred and individual approach can reduce the marginalisation of young people who already encounter significant social and economic circumstances.

In a similar study, Michael and Frederickson (2013) aimed to explore young people's perceptions of the barriers to, and enablers of, achieving positive outcomes following their exclusion from mainstream settings and subsequent attendance in a PRU. Through semi-structured interviews with 16 participants, they identified 5 overarching themes described as enabling factors: "relationships, curriculum, discipline, learning environment, and self" (p.411). Again, key themes such as smaller class sizes and positive relationships with staff, were identified as being important to young people. The authors also pulled together 3 themes which they described as "barriers to the achievement of positive outcomes: disruptive behaviour, unfair treatment and failure to individualise the learning environment" (p. 414). Based upon the participants' recommendations for improvement within AP, the authors concluded that further attention should be given to the appearance of the learning environment, increased personalisation of learning activities, and a focus on consistent and fair behaviour management approaches. They also proposed that professionals, such as EPs, should assist AP settings to work towards these improvements, and emphasised the importance of young people actively participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their own educational experiences.

Finally, in a study completed by McCluskey, Riddell and Weedon (2015), young people offered their views on exclusion and EOTAS (Education Otherwise Than At School). The sample will therefore have included views of those educated at home

which other studies presented within this chapter have not. The study highlighted that young people valued feeling listened to and supported within AP settings and were overwhelmingly positive about their overall experiences of EOTAS. Young people expressed a sense of pride in their academic achievements and feeling that they had greater opportunities for success than they were given in mainstream settings. As also found in research conducted by Ofsted (2011), young people valued being treated in adult manner and being enabled to work at their own pace. McCluskey et al. (2015) also found that being given time to talk, clear boundaries and perceived “non-judgemental attitudes” from staff, supported young people’s positive view of EOTAS. Furthermore, young people felt that teachers within AP explained information more carefully and valued young people’s efforts more so than they had experienced within mainstream settings.

It is evident from previous enquiry that many students express a positive perception of attending AP. Further to this, it has been found by Tellis-James and Fox (2016), that many students see their time in AP as a turning point in their educational careers and as a time in which they were able to experience success in their learning, sometimes for the first time. Key themes such as positive relationships with staff, smaller class sizes, and the ability to follow a personalised curriculum have emerged from the above studies as being valued by young people attending AP. In further evidence that young people view their AP experiences positively, Hart (2013) identified that students were significantly more positive about their PRU experiences, compared to their mainstream experiences. Young people strongly contrasted their relationships with staff in AP with those they had experienced in mainstream, explaining that AP staff were kind and more trustworthy. Children recognised that they had made progress and positive changes during their time in AP and valued the consistency in reward systems and expectations of their learning and behaviour. Through scaling activities, it was apparent that children had a negative perception of mainstream schooling and it was evident that many of the young people did not want to return to their previous setting. It is important to note however, that scaling has the potential for leniency errors or desirability effects, which may have impacted upon the findings (Karsten and John 1994).

2.5.2 Staff perceptions of alternative provision

Whilst many studies have emphasised the key role that staff within AP settings play, their views around AP seem to be lacking within the literature.

In one of the few available studies, Farouk (2014), explored the experiences of 3 teachers in a PRU, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology. All 3 had previously taught in mainstream settings and none had received any formal training in meeting the needs of students experiencing SEBD. The teachers described how they had been motivated to teach in the PRU by a desire to make a difference, by “turning around” and “rescuing” students, which Farouk describes as, seeking a “moral purpose”. The teachers initially felt that caring for individual students on a personal level over-ruled their teaching role in the PRU. However, over time the teachers described re-evaluating their role and accepting the limits of how much they might effect change. Similar findings were offered by Malcolm (2018b), who found that managers in AP settings had a belief in the potential for young people attending AP, which inspired their work with these students.

Hart (2013), as described in Section 2.5.1, also explored the views of staff. She found that staff and students from an AP had a shared understanding of the setting and what was in place to support young people. Staff from the study felt that children could be better supported with peer relationships in AP than in the mainstream school. Staff recognised that children typically arrived in the AP setting with poor social skills, leading to increased conflict with peers and saw this as an ongoing target. Staff also reported that due to higher staffing ratios, they were in a better position to get to know each student individually, which in turn allowed them to build more positive relationships and to provide a personalised learning experience. Hart (2013) found that the children made good progress in their literacy skills whilst at the PRU and staff from the study explained that learning could be made more relevant for young people within the AP setting, as lessons could be linked to life skills. They also reported having high expectations of the children and working hard to implement a consistent approach. The school environment was considered to be important, and staff expressed the view that ensuring the AP setting looked like a

school would be significant in assisting children's future re-integration to mainstream.

Another study which explored the views of staff was that of Putwain, Nicholson and Edwards (2016). They explored the views of staff and students attending an AP free school which aimed to re-engage students in their education. The research focused on identifying the instructional practices used within an AP setting, exploring how these were adapted to meet individual need, and what staff and students from the AP perceived to be enabling or obstructive to (re)engagement. The researchers used a combination of classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, totalling 29 hours of observation, and interviews with 35 students and 37 staff. The data was then analysed using IPA and the researchers note that although they did not conduct follow up interviews to check identified themes with participants, the extended nature of the fieldwork (which took place over the period of one month), allowed for on-going discussion of apparent themes. The researchers found that small class sizes and individualised learning supported young people's engagement. They also identified that practices such as; breaking tasks down into small steps, effective use of prompting, feedback and scaffolding, and emphasising the importance of education, whilst encouraging self-belief, were particularly effective. They hypothesise that these approaches were needed as young people did not have the necessary skills in planning, monitoring and adjusting their approach on their own. Additionally, the research highlighted that young people did not perceive that these strategies had been in place in their previous mainstream setting.

Despite the significant impact that staff appear to have on young people in AP, the retention of staff in such settings is often an issue. Gill et al. (2017) for example, found that vacancies within AP are 100-150% higher than in mainstream secondary schools. Teachers within AP are also less likely to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) than those in mainstream schools, 82% compared to 95% respectively (HCEC, 2018). Furthermore, recent research by Alvarez-Hevia (2018), suggests that many staff who take on roles in AP, leave in their first few weeks, as the initial experiences of supporting young people in these settings are emotionally challenging. In his study, which explored the views of 2 teachers and 5 mentors in a PRU, staff explained that over time they were able to cope with the negative emotions of, "horror, confusion, and uncertainty" (p.311).

2.5.3 What makes effective AP?

The requirement for AP to be appropriately matched to individual social, academic and personal needs of young people is emphasised throughout Government policy and within research literature (Bryson 2010; Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivet 2011; Pirrie et al. 2011).

As noted by Halfon et al. (HCEC, 2018), AP is varied and so there is not an overall template for good practice, however they describe how outstanding AP offers young people the opportunity to flourish through “supportive, flexible environments that meet individual needs” (p.25). Similarly, in an evaluation of research focusing on improving outcomes through AP, Gutherson, Davies and Daszkiewicz (2011), summarised that effective AP is person-centred and must be based on active assessment of individual need. It is also characterised by flexibility and accessibility, providing a personalised and relevant curriculum, with learning delivered by highly skilled staff, who are able to build supportive and trusting relationships with young people.

Smith and Thomson (2014), acknowledge that the “traditional school setting is not effective teaching for many of the students in today’s society” (p.111). They argue that AP is needed to meet the needs of this group of students and that further research is required in order to identify the psychological, sociological and pedagogical elements that support effective AP. Focusing on AP within the United States, which appears from their description, to be used in a similar way to that in the UK, Smith and Thomson (2014), identified that successful AP settings share the common understanding that not all young people learn in the same way and have the same aspirations. This understanding allows AP to build on individual needs, ensuring that young people are taught “what they need to know based on their educational and life goals” (p.118).

Similarly, McGregor and Mills (2012) draw a distinction between AP settings which,

“set up to manage young people suspended and expelled from their former schools which have as their purpose ‘disciplining’ the young person into a ‘normal student’” (p.843), with those that are “focused on changing the kinds of teaching and learning that young people engage in”. (p.843).

Whilst Government literature has maintained that AP should be on a par with mainstream education and should sufficiently prepare young people for the next

steps in education, employment or training (DfE, 2013), Pirrie et al. (2011), propose that expectations for the progress made by young people should take account of their disrupted educational pathways.

Putwain, Nicholson and Edwards (2016) extend this argument and note that young people attending AP settings will likely be working towards additional goals, which can be more difficult to quantify and measure than those academic targets typically front and centre within the mainstream curriculum. For example, the authors cite how travelling to school independently could be a significant achievement for a young person attending AP, whereas this would be taken for granted for young people attending mainstream settings.

2.5.4 Re-integration

In spite of research findings which suggest that many young people value learning in AP, there is a push for young people to return to mainstream settings, and much of the research into AP focuses on the process or impact of re-integration into mainstream schools. Perhaps one of the most influential reasons behind this focus has been the argument that successful re-integration can reduce risk factors, as identified by Hall-Lande et al. (2007). Researchers including Lawrence (2011), have therefore aimed to understand what supports successful re-integration, in the hope of improving outcomes for this group of students.

Lawrence (2011), recommended that young people were more likely to experience a successful re-integration to mainstream school if they wanted this to happen. However, as shown in the research by Jalali and Morgan (2018) in Section 2.5.1, secondary school students are often strongly reluctant to do so. This could perhaps contribute an explanation as to the finding from Burton et al. (2009), that re-integration from AP back into mainstream school was generally unsuccessful. An alternative potential explanation is offered by McSherry (2001), who describes the deterioration of young people's behaviour upon suggested re-integration to mainstream as "transfer syndrome" (p.24). She proposes that to manage their increased anxiety around the transition and in an attempt to avoid this from occurring, young people in PRUs and other AP will return to their previous patterns of challenging behaviour. The term "transfer syndrome" has however been critiqued due to the suggestion of a disorder or pathology which is not otherwise present in related literature (Pillay, Dunbar-Krige and Mostert, 2013).

Age has also been shown to correlate with re-integration, Levinson and Thompson (2016) for example, found that whilst 90% of re-integrations from AP to mainstream were successful for those in Key Stage 1 and 2, only 10-15% were successful for those in Years 10 and 11.

Burton et al (2009), found that the process of re-integration was perceived as being difficult and problematic, with schools feeling unsupported by external agencies and not having the resources available to meet individual needs. Multi-agency professionals reported that difficulties with re-integration arose because schools had not maintained sufficient contact during the child's time in AP and had then not been able to consistently continue with routines and necessary adaptations to the mainstream environment, to support a successful re-integration. Similarly, the DfES (2004) identified common barriers to successful re-integration, including school-based barriers, in which schools were reluctant to accept young people, did not have appropriate resources and did not allow for the necessary flexibility of curriculum to support a successful re-integration. Successful re-integration was also hindered by a lack of contact between the PRU and mainstream, poorly planned or timed re-integration and ineffective assessment processes.

Interestingly, Kinder et al. (2000) found that student age had an impact upon whether a decision was made to re-integrate students into mainstream settings. Specifically, those in Years 10 and 11 were less likely to be re-integrated due to concerns around their ability to catch up with missed coursework. Furthermore, young people who had experienced more than one permanent exclusion were not considered for re-integration and instead AP was identified for them to see out the rest of their education. This could explain the finding that many young people attending AP remain there for extended periods of up to 6 years (Thomson, 2017).

Similarly, Pirrie et al. (2011) explored the educational trajectories of students excluded from special schools and PRUs and found that the majority had significantly disrupted educational pathways, with some having as many as 6 subsequent placements following exclusion. The authors commented that the identification of suitable placements was a challenging and time-consuming process and that many young people spent significant periods out of any formal education. Some placements within AP settings "broke down within a matter of days" (p.529). Pillay et al. (2013) recommend that further research is needed to explore the

influence of inconsistent educational provision and highlight that many young people attending AP experience a number of unsuccessful attempts at re-integration, meaning that many stay within the AP sector. This echoes the perspective of Cole and Pritchard (2007), who report a “revolving-door” effect for young people attending AP.

2.5.5 Transition

With young people in AP potentially experiencing several exclusions and new educational placements, the topic of transition appears to be of particular relevance. However, there seems to be limited research within this specific area. Research has shown that those attending AP make up 4% of all NEET, hence there has been some interest in the transition experiences of young people moving in to Post 16 education or training, following their time in AP (DfE, 2017). The transition into AP however, does not appear to have been explored specifically within any research.

The lack of focus on this topic is perhaps, in part, because students are not intended to remain in AP for a significant length of time. However, as shown in Section 2.5.4, they often do. I therefore believe that finding out more about young people’s transitions into AP is worthy of research.

Transitions have been described as, “moments of possibility, when experiences of change allow the individual to develop in new ways, for better or worse” (O’Riordan, 2015, p.415). Transitions can also be a time of increased anxiety and stress, leading to amplified difficulties in managing behaviour (Buchanan, Nese and Clark, 2016). Perhaps because of this, young people labelled as having SEBD/SEMH needs, have appeared to experience greater difficulty than their peers in managing key transitions, such as the transition from secondary school to adult life (Casey et al. 2006; Polat and Farrell 2002; Polat et al. 2001). Research has also shown that these young people often experience inadequate transition planning (Wood and Cronin, 1999). Unfortunately, when young people experience negative transitions, this has been linked with negative implications for well-being, academic progress and mental health (Zeedyk et al. 2003).

O’Riordan (2015) used a longitudinal design to explore the views of 15 students experiencing SEBD, leaving school. Participants were interviewed three times in

their final year of school and then took part in follow up interviews 15 months later. Data was also collected from key figures in the young person's life, such as parents and key workers, to form a detailed case study for each participant. O'Riordan (2015) determined that successful transitions were facilitated by positive relationships with professionals, and that the process of identity verification³ played a key role in the development of these positive relationships. Identity verification occurs when the feedback we get from our environment and relationships confirm that we are, who we think we are. Participants in the research who experienced high levels of identity verification were able to achieve positive outcomes despite highly challenging circumstances, whereas those who were in non-verifying educational situations sought to verify their identity in other ways. O'Riordan (2015) concluded that many young people who experience SEBD have developed identities which do not always promote learning, leading to poor outcomes educationally and at a wider level. She recommends that identity-focused practice can be used to inspire students to consider more positive identities and that transition should be a vital opportunity to support young people in constructing new identities that can be verified through the new environment and relationships.

Bagley and Hallam (2015), also emphasise the importance of transition for young people excluded from school in their work on managed moves, suggesting that,

"It was critical that the young people experienced a well-planned, nurturing transition and felt genuinely welcomed and valued by the host school" (p.442).

Similar findings were offered by Trotman, Tucker and Martyn's (2015), who found that behaviour coordinators and head teachers from AP settings reported that a poorly managed transition between primary and secondary school, led to a rise in negative behaviour and more unmet needs for young people. In their study, 49 young people were also asked for their views relating to behaviour and exclusion within the Secondary school setting. The research was commissioned by a consortium of schools who had experienced an increase in referrals for AP, in the hope that gaining young people's views, alongside views of staff, would offer an insight into the impact of the Key Stage 3 curriculum on behaviour and subsequent exclusions. The 49 students, selected from 2 AP settings and 11 Secondary schools,

³ Identity verification theory suggests that individuals want to be known and understood by others according to their personal view of themselves.

each participated in a 1:1 semi-structured interview and were asked questions relating to their experiences of school, behaviour within the classroom, experiences of exclusion and attendance in AP, and how they viewed themselves. Five recurrent themes were identified by the researchers including: the transition into secondary school, transition between Key Stages 3 and 4, feelings of anger and calm, teaching and learning, and parental involvement. Further information is shown in Table 2.

The authors conclude that exclusions and challenging behaviour were often related to a series of failed transitions and that difficulties associated with these transitions, if unsupported, would often increase during the first three years at secondary school. The researchers recommended that offering more positive attention to the transition experiences of young people with behavioural needs would support the improved management of behaviour referrals and exclusions.

In my view, this research offers further incentive for exploring the transition experiences of young people moving in to AP, as statistics suggest that many of these students will have SEBD/SEMH needs (HCEC, 2018).

Theme	Description
Primary to Secondary transition.	Students experienced a loss of relationship quality with their teachers in the move from primary to secondary school. They expressed a feeling of being lost physically in the new environment but also feeling emotionally lost. The transition between primary and secondary was viewed as a move from childhood to adulthood.
Transition between Key Stage 3 and 4.	Students appeared to place great importance on entering Year 10 and needing to start making positive changes to gain qualifications and jobs in the future. They valued being able to choose their own subjects.
Feelings of Anger and Calm.	Students mentioned anger management courses, being able to pre-empt any outbursts and learning control over their emotions. They proposed that the AP environment and teachers promoted a calm atmosphere and personalised work space.
Teaching and Learning.	There was no apparent link between students' like or dislike of subjects and their subsequent behaviour in these lessons. Students reported being able to set their own targets and develop a relationship with staff as more important in supporting them to control their behaviour and in how much they enjoyed a subject.
Parental involvement.	Parents contact with secondary schools was often greatly reduced from

	what it had been in the primary setting. Students described that when parents attended meetings they were often invited to join but were not involved and often felt ignored.
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Table identifying themes adapted from Trotman, Tucker and Martyn (2015)

2.6 Relevance for Educational Psychology

AP is currently high on the political agenda (HCEC, 2018) and with school exclusions and the number of young people attending AP increasing, additional research into the area seems justified. As a TEP I have personally encountered a number of students educated in AP and believe that the overall topic has significance within the field of Educational Psychology.

EPs have been argued to be well-placed in supporting those excluded from school. Kinder et al. (2000) for example, reported that EPs are an important service in meeting the needs of excluded pupils, through involvement in steering groups, multi-agency teams and multi-disciplinary panels. EPs are also able to undertake direct work, particularly individual assessment of student needs. Kinder et al. (2000) suggest that this individual assessment often aims at providing an understanding of learning needs, enabling the definition of learning and behavioural targets, and ensuring that upon re-integration the receiving school had detailed information.

Tellis-James and Fox (2016), also argue that EPs should have a role in, “supporting stakeholders to construct meaning and promoting understanding that change is possible” (p.339). Furthermore, Ewen and Topping (2012), argue that EPs are ideally positioned to support in the development and evaluation of provision, which is centred around the personalised learning of young people who experience SEBD, or who are currently dis-engaging from education. They argue that EPs are,

“well placed to research and advise on what is necessary and helpful in terms of implementing personalised learning and supporting change within mainstream school environments to assist the inclusion of this group of young people, potentially avoiding the need for alternative educational provision.” (p.237).

Furthermore, Lawrence (2011), proposes that EPs should play a role in providing a psychological service to AP settings and believes that through this, EPs can support successful re-integration practices by enabling clear identification of individual need,

accessing the voice of the child, and through involvement with systemic change and development.

Recent written evidence from the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), submitted to the House of Commons regarding the inquiry into AP, further suggests that, the referral process for those entering AP should involve relevant professionals such as EPs, stating that those placed in AP should be offered EP advice and assessment of need (AEP, 2018).

2.7 Questions emerging from the literature

It is evident from the literature explored throughout this chapter that despite consistent interest and research in the field of AP, we still know limited amounts about young people's experiences of AP. This is further reinforced by the Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper (March 2016), which recommended that the Government would "support new research into how pupils arrive in AP and develop and disseminate new evidence on what works" (DfE, 2016, pp. 103).

Research exploring the perspective of young people proposes that attendance at AP can have a positive impact for many young people, and Hart (2013), questions whether the environment offered in some AP settings allows for some students to achieve more than they would in a mainstream setting, with differences in the provision serving as protective factors for those who are typically vulnerable and at risk in many other ways. A similar view is presented by De Monchy, Pijl, and Zandberg (2004), de Jong and Griffiths (2006) and Michael and Frederickson (2013), who propose that the flexibility offered within AP settings can make them more appropriate in meeting the needs of young people who experience SEBD. However, as shown in other research, the outcomes of young people attending AP are often unsatisfactory and this has stimulated further investigation into how AP can be improved (HCEC, 2018).

Many of the studies discussed throughout this chapter have highlighted the importance of building relationships with staff, however, there appears to be limited research with AP staff in finding out how they develop these relationships, and how they perceive their role in supporting young people to succeed whilst attending AP. Transition has also been highlighted, through several studies, as a key area of need

for these young people. Whilst there has been a focus on the transition from AP back into the mainstream setting, or on to adult life, transition into AP has been given little to no attention.

As described by Ofsted (2011), when AP is at its best, the provider has been carefully selected, is valued by students, and is used effectively to support learning across the whole curriculum, in order to re-engage young people in their education. To achieve this, schools need to share relevant information with the AP and agree what information should be gathered, to monitor and evaluate young people's progress whilst attending the AP. Ofsted (2011), also recommended that school staff should regularly visit the AP to check on progress and maintain involvement with the students. They found that schools did not always effectively communicate information about how to work effectively with individual students and build on progress made within the AP. Of course, it could be argued that if schools knew this information there would perhaps not be the need for AP. Ofsted (2011) found that it was rare for young people to meet with a member of staff from the AP prior to starting their placement, and that information about young people's SEN, social and behavioural skills, and current levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy, were not consistently shared between the school and AP setting.

These findings are all relevant to a young person's initial transition into AP, and with research suggesting that re-integration to mainstream is often unsuccessful, and that those who experience repeated exclusions often remain in AP for extended periods, finding out more about young people's transition into AP appears to be of even greater importance.

A need for increased attention on the transition into AP can also be drawn from Conchas and Clarke (2002), who argue that experiences of failure can restrict young people's hopes and aspirations, also reducing their self-confidence and self-efficacy. It is therefore also important to find out more about what can contribute towards a successful transition for young people moving in to AP, so that the potential impact of a negative transition can be avoided. I have chosen to include the views of both staff and students, as the research presented within this chapter has identified that students highly value their relationships with staff in AP.

With that in mind, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What factors do students and staff perceive as working well in supporting young people's transition into AP?

- 2) What can we learn from young people's experiences to adapt future transition planning within an AP?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will review the purpose and aims of the research, introducing key research questions. The study's philosophical positioning, including the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the research will also be discussed, followed by a description of the study's research design, recruitment processes and full methodology. Consideration of the approaches chosen will be given throughout the chapter. This will be followed by an outline of the data collection and analysis approaches used, detailing the exact process by which the study was conducted. The chapter will conclude with an exploration of ethical considerations arising from the research and a discussion of the trustworthiness and validity of the research process.

3.1 Research Objectives and Questions

Information presented within Section 2.5.5, demonstrates that transition is generally difficult for vulnerable groups, such as those with SEMH needs, many of whom go on to attend AP settings (Trotman et al. 2015). Research also shows that young people often stay in AP for an extended period, particularly those in years 10 and 11 (Thomson, 2017). Understanding how young people experience transition into AP is therefore essential in ensuring that this is a positive move for young people, and as shown within the literature review, this is currently an under-researched topic.

With that in mind, the current study aimed to explore young people's experiences of transition into AP. The proposed purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of factors that students and staff perceived to support transition into AP, and to use this information to consider how transition practices might be improved. In so doing, the research intended to answer the following questions:

- 1) What factors do students and staff perceive as working well in supporting young people's transition into AP?
- 2) What can we learn from young people's experiences to adapt future transition planning within an AP?

The findings have been related to work within Educational Psychology, with considerations as to how EP's might support settings to enhance the transition process of young people attending AP (Section 5.5).

The research was exploratory in nature, as it aimed to uncover a range of views regarding transition into AP. Robson (2002), proposed that exploratory research has value in its ability to explore topics in novel ways, with findings then related back to the current literature. As shown in the literature review, much of the previous research on AP has been concerned with re-integration back into the mainstream setting, or young people's experiences of attending AP. The current research aimed to extend knowledge of young people's AP experiences, by discovering views around the initial transition into AP. Importantly, the research also looked at the views of staff, as research presented within the literature review demonstrated the significance of staff relationships for those attending AP.

The research also focussed on "what works", using positive and solution focused psychology and an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.5. It was hoped that young people would feel empowered through their involvement and being offered a platform to express their points of view. Furthermore, an outcome of the research involved sharing the themes gathered from student participants with staff at the AP, to enable the consideration of how these findings could inform and build on successful practice, through the process of AI.

3.2 – Child voice

It has been argued that listening to children is essential in developing our understanding of problems and their potential resolutions (Davie, Upton and Varma, 1996). The significance of hearing young people's voice is now well established in many ways and plays a core role in legislation SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DfH, 2014). There is a growing body of research which stems from the belief that we can learn from young people, by trying to understand their experiences (Tellis-James and Fox, 2016).

Michael and Frederickson (2013), argue that although there has been a growing interest in hearing the voice of young people, those experiencing SEBD, are often under-represented within this research. As evidenced by Martin and White (2012), young people described as having SEBD, account for the majority of those with SEN in AP. However, Nind et al (2012), suggest that when young people who experience SEBD are asked for their views, this has typically been to satisfy a professional agenda, and Corbett (1998), has also argued that those labelled as having SEBD are

less likely to be listened to with respect. Cefai and Cooper (2010), propose that listening to those who experience SEBD is important in understanding the reasons behind behavioural difficulties, which would otherwise be overlooked by others.

A similar view is shared by Munn and Lloyd (2005), who argued that when young people are asked for their views on experiences of exclusion, they are able to provide a unique and valuable insight. There are, however, ethical considerations and a need for increased sensitivity when working with this group, as young people may find discussing experiences of exclusion and attendance at alternative settings difficult. Articles 3, 12 and 36 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) are of particular relevance in ensuring that young people are enabled to discuss issues relevant to their own lives, whilst reducing the potential for harm, and working within their best interests.

3.2.1 The voice of girls

Russell and Thomson (2011), emphasised that the majority of current literature around school exclusion focuses on the experiences of boys. They argued that the lack of consideration given to girls attending AP within the literature, only serves to further marginalise them. In their ethnographic study, the researchers found that girls had varying responses to attending AP and concluded that, “being a girl in an alternative programme is not as positive an experience as it might be” (p.305). Through six case studies the researchers identified that girls attending AP adopted strategies such as, “trouble-stirring”, “boyish behaviours” and “remaining quiet”, to cope in their minority gender position. They found that girls were more likely to be offered vocational options based upon gender-stereotypical assumptions, such as, childminding or hair and beauty. More academically focused options were not on offer in the same way as they were to boys.

Clarke, Boorman and Nind (2011) also comment on the missing voice of girls with BESD and later explored how this voice can be accessed through creative approaches, such as the use of a “Diary room” and through digital visual and narrative methods (Nind, Boorman and Clarke, 2012).

With girls increasingly experiencing multiple exclusions and becoming more likely to attend AP settings (HCEC, 2018), the current research has aimed to include the voice of females, alongside any male participants.

3.3 Philosophical Positioning

3.3.1 The Research Paradigm

The researcher's philosophical positioning and chosen research paradigm have been described as having implications for all decisions made within the research process (Mertens, 2010). The research paradigm can be understood as a way of understanding the world, or as described by Willis (2007, p.9), "a complex belief system". This world-view is made up of a range of philosophical assumptions, which then influence and inform the subsequent planning and undertaking of the research.

Some of the dominant research paradigms within educational and psychological research have been the Positivist and Post-positivism paradigms (Mertens, 2010). Positivist paradigms propose that society can be explored in a value-free and objective way, so that causal conclusions can be made. Post-positivists somewhat modify their claims that findings are certain, and instead rely upon probability. Both paradigms are therefore more guiding towards quantitative methodologies, in search of a single reality or truth (Mertens, 2010).

Conversely, the constructivist paradigm, which evolved through the philosophy of hermeneutics⁴ (Eichelberger, 1989), is concerned with the investigation of interpretive meaning. Furthermore, the social constructivist paradigm, which underpins the current study, asserts that research cannot be considered independently to the researcher's values, and suggests that researchers must appreciate the complexities of individual experience through the views of others (Schwandt, 2000). I have therefore included a rationale for the current research, including my own position and perspectives on the topic, in the introductory chapter of this thesis. As noted by Greene and Hill (2010), I believe that researchers are not truly objective. Within qualitative research it has been argued that the researcher's own beliefs have a substantial impact on the process and findings of research (Coyle, 2007).

3.3.2 Ontology

⁴ Hermeneutics refers to interpretation of literature.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and has been described by Willig (2013) as asking the question, “What is there to know?”. The current study has adopted the ontological position of social constructionism. A social constructionist perspective suggests that the construction of knowledge occurs within social interaction, through language and discourse (Creswell, 2014).

According to Burr (1995), the key principles of social constructionism are:

- A critical stance towards knowledge that is assumed and taken for granted, with a suggestion that our individual perceptions influence our understanding of the world.
- Society and cultural experiences have an influence upon the way we understand the world.
- Knowledge has a collective nature, which is co-constructed through interactions and communication.
- There is a link between knowledge and action, so our beliefs impact our behaviour.

In essence, social constructionism asserts that there can be no definitive knowledge, distinct from its social, cultural or historical context. This is the ontological viewpoint that underpins the current research.

Unlike research conducted within the objectivist or positivist paradigm, the information gathered in this study does not aim to capture a definitive reality which can be generalised to the whole population. Whilst the participants in the study share the common experience of attending or working in AP, they are not considered to be a homogenous group. A social constructionist approach is therefore appropriate, as it takes in to account the subjective life experiences and world views of individual participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). However, it is hoped that the individual accounts can offer potential ways forwards, which can then be adapted to suit each unique context, as a catalyst for further investigation or improvement.

Furthermore, social constructionism proposes that we can co-construct new realities through social interactions (Houston, 2001). This premise relates to the chosen methodological approach of this research, further discussed in Section 3.8.

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology focuses on the meaning of knowledge and has been described by Guba & Lincoln (2005) as, “the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known” (p.201).

It has been suggested that there are three key epistemological positions (McEvoy and Richard, 2006). The “positivist” viewpoint argues that knowledge is observable and measurable, therefore research within this field tends to focus on large data sets, in search of causal relationships through statistical analysis. “Realism”, on the other hand, proposes that whilst there is an external reality that can be observed, the ability to uncover this truth is influenced by a range of factors and that not all realities will be accurately observed. Finally, the third epistemological position is “interpretivism” which guides the current research. Interpretivism asserts that knowledge is subjective and is gained through our interpretations of what others do, how they think and what is important to them.

In line with interpretivist principles, the present research aimed to discover the views and experiences of participants and is guided by the belief that there is no single reality or truth. Reality is instead considered to be created by individuals and groups, each reality is formed in the moment, so there are multiple possible realities. The study is interpretivist in nature, as reality must be interpreted and then explored to understand any potential underlying meanings. Furthermore, influenced by the transformative paradigm, the research is steered by the belief that power issues and cultural complexities further influence the interpretation of reality, and as Harding (1993), asserts, that research should empower marginalised groups.

3.3.4 Real World Research

This research aimed to contribute to an understanding of real-world problems and to bring about positive change. Rather than focusing solely on gaining knowledge about young people’s transition experiences into AP, the study aimed to explore how we can learn from this to adapt future practice. In this way the study can be considered real world research (Robson, 2002). In conducting this research, it was important to me, as a researcher, that the findings had a function for those involved and so upon completion, the findings will be shared with the setting involved and the LA in which the research was conducted. The research is also hoped to have an impact through its methodological approach, which is discussed in greater detail in Sections 3.4 and 3.8.

3.4 Alternative Approaches

A range of methodological approaches were considered in the design of this research, these will be discussed to provide transparency of decision making processes (Stiles, 1993). Three key approaches were considered, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Narrative Inquiry and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). These were considered to be in line with the philosophical positioning of the research and appeared reasonable in answering the defined research questions.

IPA aims to gather a rich picture of each participant's experience, with the researcher offering insights into how the participant made sense of that experience (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). It seeks to understand how people describe their own experiences and attach meaning to life events (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Similarly, Narrative Inquiry, focuses on the experiences of individuals as told through their own stories, and seeks to understand the way in which individuals create meaning from these experiences (Chamberlain, 2011).

Whilst both of these approaches were considered appropriate for the current research when exploring the views of young people, they did not appear a good fit for exploring the views of staff in AP who supported them. Furthermore, the study intended to move beyond a description of participant experiences, in the hope of identifying how these experiences might be used to bring about positive change.

For this reason, the study used an AI methodology, which is embedded within the social constructionist paradigm (Gergen, 2009). Cooperrider et al. (1995), state that through the process of AI, organisations can be re-imagined. Furthermore, AI emphasises the opportunity for change, using positive language to transform stories within a setting. AI has been praised as a particularly effective tool when exploring relationships (Cooperrider et al., 1995), and I therefore felt that AI would be appropriate in answering the questions defined in this research.

3.5 Appreciative Inquiry

AI was chosen with the aim of exploring what works well in supporting young people's transition into AP and how this could potentially be made even better. AI

was originally developed to encourage the use of appreciative and positive conversations, to motivate and bring about change within organisations (Grant and Humphries, 2006). It is a relatively new addition to research within Education (Fergy, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Shapcott and Burke, 2011). Essentially, AI is used to identify the best of what is and to explore opportunities of what could be. Ludema and Fry (2008), describe AI as a “a robust process of inquiry and anticipatory learning that enables participants in social systems to shape the world they most want by building new knowledge, spurring inventiveness, creating energy, and enhancing cooperative activity.” (p. 280).

An alternative approach would be a problem-oriented approach, which Cooperider and Srivastva (1987), have argued places too much emphasis on the problem. They proposed that this can lead to doubt and uncertainty. AI, on the other hand, focuses on organisational challenges and concerns, through exploration of what is working well (Coghlan, Preskill and Catsambas, 2003). AI has been criticised for focusing too much on the positive and therefore not acknowledging the issue or problem at hand (Mertens, 2010). Fitzgerald et al. (2010) for example, argue that AI restricts the problem solving and idea generation which can arise through discussing issues and difficult experiences.

In counter argument to the suggestion that AI ignores the negative, Oliver (2005), proposes that the approach has the potential to explore both positive and negative views at the same time. He argues that what one individual may see as positive, another may see as a negative, and this can be brought to light through the AI process. Furthermore, through the exploration of what participants would consider to be an improvement in the organisation, it is likely that any negative views can be expressed and then worked on, to move towards a solution. In this way the approach is also grounded within a Solution-Focused approach.

3.5.1 The Philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry

Hammond (1996), demonstrates the philosophy of AI as the belief that:

- Something works within every organisation or group.
- Our focus determines our reality. There are multiple realities which can be created in any moment.

- Linguistics influence our reality. Questions have an effect on the individuals or groups to whom they are directed.
- Building on past experiences encourages feelings of comfort and confidence. It is important to focus on past strengths if these are to be carried forward.

Several principles of AI have also been recommended. Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2005), proposed the first five: The constructionist principle, the simultaneity principle, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle and the positive principle. Three more principles were later added by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010); The wholeness principle, the enactment principle and the free-choice principle. Further information is shown in the table below.

AI Principle	Definition
The constructionist principle	Language and discourse are powerful creators of reality and the possible. Questions are important in developing our understanding not only of what has already happened but of what might happen in the future.
The simultaneity principle	Inquiry is intervention. In asking questions we bring about change.
The poetic principle	An organisation's story is constantly being co-authored, there are endless interpretative possibilities.
The anticipatory principle	Imagining the future guides current action. Positive images of the future lead to positive actions.
The positive principle	The more positive a question we ask, the more long-lasting and successful the effort for change. We must design and ask unconditionally positive questions.
The wholeness principle	Bringing groups together stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.
The enactment principle	Positive change is created when change is a living model of the ideal future.
The free-choice principle	Free choice stimulates positive change, commitment and better performance.

Table 3: Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

AI is therefore in line with the overarching philosophical underpinning of this research and can be linked to the social constructionist paradigm (Gergen, 2009).

3.5.2 The Appreciative Inquiry Process

Typically, AI involves a four-step process (Figure 1.), known as the “4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry” (Cooperrider et al., 1995). AI starts with the *Discovery* phase, which involves appreciating the best of what is (Hammond, 2013). The second stage is referred to as the *Dream* phase and this is used to encourage participants to envisage what the organisation would be like when functioning at an optimum level.

In the *Design* phase, participants are then asked to consider strategies and tools they could use to create and support positive change, in order to reach the goals outlined within the *Dream* phase (Mertens, 2010). Finally, in the *Destiny* Phase participants begin to implement the strategies developed and monitor their progress. The AI process can then start again if necessary, to keep things moving in a positive direction (Watkins and Mohr, 2001).

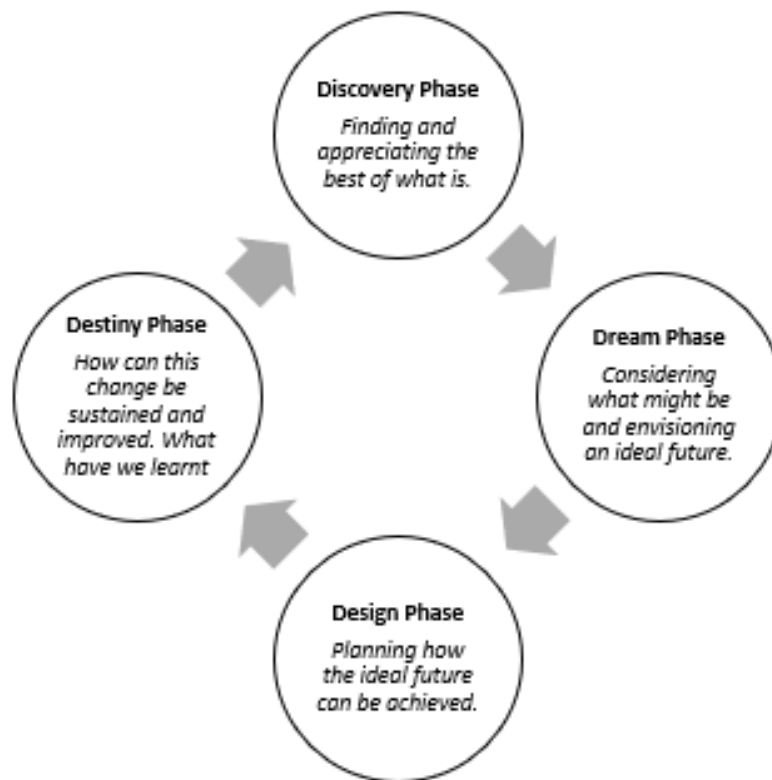


Figure 1: “4D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry” adapted from (Cochlan, Preskill and Catsambas, 2003 and Cooperrider et al. 1995).

Before I go on to explain how AI was used within the current research, I will now describe the research setting and recruitment procedures used. The research design will then be further explored in Section 3.8.

3.6. The Research Setting

Prior to identifying the research setting, I spoke with an Education Officer within the LA in which the research was conducted, to find out what AP was available in the area. I then went on informal visits to three settings, to find out more about each provision.

The final AP setting was selected through purposive sampling (Bloor and Wood, 2006), meaning that I chose it based upon characteristics of the population and its potential to answer the overall objectives of this research.

The setting was identified because it:

- Had a “Good” Ofsted rating and had maintained this rating over a number of years.
- Catered for students in Key Stage 3 and above.
- Offered a varied curriculum, including qualifications, vocational options and therapeutic provision.
- Was approved by the LA, meaning that they would often identify this setting when young people had been permanently excluded.
- Was also used by a range of schools to provide AP for those at-risk of exclusion.
- Had a consistent student population and was often over-subscribed.

These factors were considered to be relevant in reference to the literature presented within Chapter 2. Whilst this study does not intend to provide generalisable findings, a clear description of the research setting is offered to enable the reader to determine other situations, contexts and people, to which the findings may have relevance. To protect the anonymity of participants some details have not been included.

The AP within this study has been rated “Good” in all Ofsted inspections since opening. A significant proportion of students on roll have EHCPs or statements of SEN. According to their website, the provision states its mission as providing students with a sense of “success and positive achievement”, both “personally and academically”. Students at the AP follow “bespoke” curriculums including GCSEs, functional skills and entry-level certificates. The majority of young people have identified SEMH needs and have not been able to access learning within the mainstream setting. Students are placed in the provision by LAs or by secondary schools. The provision is owned by a company which manages several AP settings across the country. The AP is split across two sites, one of which is located on a

trading estate, and the other, on a housing estate; students and staff from both sites participated in this research.

3.7 Participant sampling

3.7.1 Staff sample

AI approaches do not dictate a recommended sample size and have been used with a wide range of participant numbers, from as many as 5000 participants, to less than 20 (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001).

All teaching and support staff from the AP were invited to attend an initial information session about the research project, during an already scheduled team meeting. Please see Appendix 4 for a copy of the PowerPoint used in this meeting. Following this, staff were given an information sheet (Appendix 5) and letter (Appendix 11). They were asked to indicate if they would like to be involved in the study via an expression of interest form (Appendix 6).

Those who chose to participate were then invited to the subsequent focus group sessions, which were again scheduled to take place in staff meeting times. Staff participants were allocated at random to a focus group, of a maximum of 8 people, to make this a more manageable process for the researcher (Mertens, 2010). All staff were required to give informed consent. In total, 13 staff members participated in the study, and so this involved 2 staff focus groups in phase 1 (The *Discovery* and *Dream* phases). Participant profiles can be found in Section 3.8. As the phase 2 focus group would not be transcribed, all staff participants were invited to the same meeting. Due to factors such as illness and staff having moved on, there were a total of 10 staff in the final phase 2 focus group (in which themes from previous data were shared and staff used this to complete the *Design* phase).

3.7.2 Student sample

An initial information session was delivered to the students as a 15-minute, informal information giving slot, with additional time for questions. A copy of the PowerPoint used can be found in Appendix 4. The session was planned to take place as part of students' everyday morning meeting. Students were given a letter

(Appendix 9) and information sheet (Appendix 5). They were asked to complete the expression of interest form to indicate if they would like to be involved in the individual student interviews at a later date (Appendix 6). Copies of these were kept in the common room, so that students could take one at any time. I stayed on at the provision for the rest of the morning, so that young people could get to know me, and ask any further questions without an audience. Leadership at the AP recommended that students would feel more comfortable in sharing their views with me if they could build a relationship first and so it was decided that I would visit the AP several times. In total I visited the AP 3 times prior to conducting any interviews. I was careful not to take on the role of a staff member for ethical reasons, as I did not want students to begin see me in that role and for this to influence the way in which they shared their views. When at the AP I therefore helped out with tasks such as the washing up and preparing resources, rather than supporting young people with their learning.

A limit was not set on the number of young people who could participate in the study as I wanted all of them to have the opportunity to express their views. Although there was therefore potential for all young people to seek involvement, this seemed achievable as the setting only had 16 students on roll at the time.

In total, 8 young people took part, 4 girls and 4 boys. This included 4 from each of the two AP sites. Participant profiles can be found in Section 3.8. Initially 10 students indicated that they would like to take part, however 1 later withdrew prior to the interview and another was not present on any of the interview dates. It is important to acknowledge that those who declined to participate may have had different experiences from those who took part, and it could be that those who felt more negatively, were less inclined to participate, which would have implications on the findings.

3.8 Participant Profiles

To assist the reader in interpreting the findings from this research I will now outline a brief profile of the participants. Information has been presented so as to protect the anonymity of participants.

3.8.1 Staff profiles

13 members of staff participated in the research. This involved 4 teachers and 8 key-workers. Length of time working in the AP varied, as shown in the table below:

Time working in AP	Total number of staff	Roles
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Less than 6 months	4	1 teacher, 2 key-workers
6 – 12 months	2	1 teacher, 1 key-worker
12 – 18 months	2	1 teacher, 1 key-worker
18 months – 2 years	2	2 key-workers
Over 2 years	3	1 teacher, 2 key-workers

Table 4: Staff profiles

3.8.2 Student profiles

Four male and four female student participants took part in individual interviews. The majority of students were aged 15, one was 14 and another 17. As mentioned in Section 2.3, 72% of those attending AP are male, and 47% are aged between 15 and 16 (HCEC, 2018).

Students had been at the AP for varying periods, as shown in the table below, they had all been at the AP for over 6 months.

Half of the young people had an EHCP or Statement of SEN, although all were described by the SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator), as having some SEN. This reflects the findings presented in Section 2.3, which suggest that 77.1% of those attending AP have identified SEN and a further 10.4% have a formal statement or EHCP (HCEC, 2018). Half of the students in the current sample were also Looked After Children (LAC). The gender and age of participants is not shown in the table to further protect anonymity.

Time in AP	EHCP/Statement	LAC	Background
18 months – 2 years	Yes	No	Excluded from 2 mainstream schools and 1 special school
1 year - 18 months	No	No	Excluded from 1 mainstream school
6 – 12 months	Yes	No	Excluded from 2 mainstream schools, one managed move, 1 placement in special school
1 year - 18 months	No	Yes	Excluded from 1 mainstream school
18 months – 2 years	No	Yes	Excluded from 1 mainstream school
1 year - 18 months	No	No	Excluded from 2 mainstream schools
18 months – 2 years	Yes	Yes	Several changes of school due to moving, excluded from 1 mainstream secondary.

6 – 12 months	Yes	Yes	No exclusions. Sent to AP by a mainstream secondary to support the transition into college
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Table 5: Student profiles

The following vignettes use pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. Young people offered the following information about themselves in their individual

Jessica was passionate about music, dancing and hoped to go on to study childcare following her time at the AP.

Shannon loved fashion, especially sparkly dresses, and hoped to one day be in the police, catching criminals.

Tyreece wasn't sure what he wanted to do in the future and was keen to keep playing games like Fortnite on his X-Box.

Jack was looking forward to moving on to college to study plastering, get a job and start making money. He enjoyed skating and going to the park with friends.

Katy wanted to get a job in a shop and loved her pet dogs.

Zoe enjoyed looking after younger children and wanted to study childcare at college.

Alex loved all things James Bond and was frequently humming the Mission Impossible theme tune. He wanted to be either a DJ or work in IT. Alex liked to mix his own music and make CDs for others to play in the common room at the AP.

Patrick was a big fan of Fortnite and hoped to do an Apprenticeship in building and construction.

interviews.

Table 6: Student vignettes

3.9 Research Design

This section will detail how the AI approach was used within the current research and describes the methods chosen to gather and analyse data.

3.9.1 The AI cycle within the current research

This research focuses on the first three stages of the AI process, as outlined in Figure 2.

AI typically relies on interactive approaches such as group discussion and interviews. Given the research's philosophical positioning, this study has used a qualitative approach, via individual interviews and focus groups. These approaches

were selected in connection with the assumption that the social construction of reality can only be conducted through interaction between the researcher and participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Further information about the data collection methods chosen is provided below.

The current research used a combination of staff focus groups and individual student interviews to inform the AI cycle.

The *Discovery* and *Dream* stages were informed by individual student interviews and phase 1 staff focus groups. Questions focused on discovering the “best of what is” and “envisioning what might be” (Hammond, 2013). Data from these stages were then pooled to inform the *Design* phase, through phase 2 staff focus groups, as shown in Figure 2.

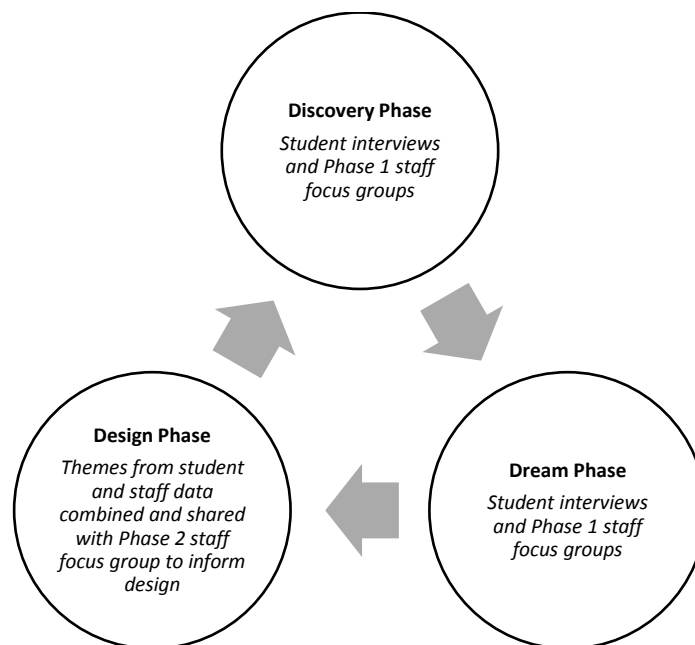


Figure 2: The process of AI within the current study.

Themes from the study were presented to staff via a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 19) and they were given time to ask questions to clarify understanding of the themes. In the *Design* phase, a phase 2 staff focus group was then asked to create some "provocative propositions", as described by Hammond (2013). Provocative propositions are symbolic statements which aim to answer how the dream might be realised. They are said to add power to the AI cycle, as they remind the group of high points they have experienced and are derived from stories which actually took place in the organisation (Hammond, 2013).

Finally, the group was then asked to use this information to consider what they might practically be able to put into action to continue improving their provision.

The *Destiny* phase was not explored within the current research as this is a process that takes place within the organisation over time (Hammond, (2013).

3.9.2 Data collection methods

Focus groups were identified as an appropriate data collection method for staff participants, as this was consistent with AI principles which suggest that meaning is co-constructed and that change can be created through group interaction.

It was recommended by leadership staff from the AP that students would not cope well in a focus group set up. They recommended that students attending the AP would be likely to have difficulty engaging with tasks in group sizes of more than 4-5, and hence, focus groups did not seem to meet the needs of the individual students. Individual interviews were therefore chosen above a group interview or focus group for student participants, in the hope that this would encourage young people to feel able to give their own unique perspectives and not be influenced by being in a group. This was of particular importance as the young people would be describing a time in which they may have felt particularly vulnerable, in their transition into the AP. Furthermore, it was considered unethical to ask young people about their experiences with staff present, for example in a joint focus group, as this could have made them feel unable to express potentially negative opinions.

A semi-structured and flexible interviewing style was used, to allow participants to lead discussion and contribute in their chosen way, whilst ensuring coverage of relevant areas and themes relating to the research questions.

In line with AI principles, the interview and focus group schedules were designed to promote a positive perspective of “what is” and “what might be”. Hammond (2013), proposed that the interviewer should aim to find out:

- How the participant viewed their experience and how they perceived their own involvement to have made a difference.
- Ways in which other people influenced the experience.
- The systemic factors or policies that made success possible.

Furthermore, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), recommend that the interview should begin with *backwards questions*, in which participants recall highlights of their experiences, before moving on to *inward questions*, which ask them to consider what led to these successes, and finally, *forward questions*, which prompt aspirations and hopes for the future.

A copy of the interview schedule used for student interviews and staff focus groups can be found in Appendix 13 and 14. Questions were developed in collaboration with my placement supervisor to ensure that they made sense and related to AI principles. These were then informally piloted in my casework as a TEP.

All interviews and phase 1 focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. It was decided that in the phase 2 focus group, focusing on the *Design* phase, flipchart paper would be used to record a summary of key areas that the group decided to take forward. Transcription and thematic analysis were not thought to be required at this stage, as further interpretation of the data was not needed.

3.9.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen to analyse data from the current study as it can be used to provide a rich and thorough interpretation of complex data and is a flexible approach, which is consistent with the constructionist paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I also thought that thematic analysis would enable the bringing together of ideas from the two methods of data collection (focus groups and interviews), and thus, would work well with the AI cycle. Braun and Clarke (2006), propose that as thematic analysis can be used both inductively and deductively, it has the potential to explore and describe existing theory and can also be used to generate novel concepts.

There are a range of techniques for thematic analysis (Joffe and Yardley, 2004; Tuckett, 2005). I chose to use the six-phase guide, recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), as this provided a clear process and structure. Without clear guidelines around the use of thematic analysis, qualitative approaches are open to criticism, as noted by Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter (2002). The analysis aimed to surpass the semantic level, to explore any underlying ideas and conceptualisations that I interpreted from the data. In line with the constructivist perspectives outlined earlier within this chapter, the data analysis aimed to theorise within the socio-cultural context of AP, rather than focusing on individuals (Burr, 1995). Thematic analysis was used across the range of interviews and phase 1 focus groups, to explore and identify repeated patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.9.3.1 Familiarisation with the data

Once data had been collected from student interviews and phase 1 focus groups, these were transcribed by me. Transcribing the data, although time consuming, has been recommended as an essential stage of analysis when using qualitative interpretive approaches (Bird, 2005). Thematic analysis does not stipulate that a specific transcription convention is used, as might be required of similar analysis methods, such as discourse or narrative analysis. In the current research I transcribed the data via typing, giving a detailed verbatim account of what was said and any additional non-verbal information, such as sniffing or yawning. Punctuation, bold and underlining, were used to show emphasis on particular words. During the transcription process, which involved repeated listening to the interviews, I recorded my initial thoughts and ideas around potential themes which I perceived to be important and relevant within the data. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), this is an indispensable step in the procedure of completing thematic analysis as this encourages the researcher to become engrossed in the data, so that they are familiar with the richness of it.

3.9.3.2 Initial codes

Once the interviews had been transcribed and I had familiarised myself with the data, I had developed a range of initial thoughts about what the data was communicating. This process, closely informed by the data, allowed for the generation of initial codes and the organisation of my preliminary thoughts about the data, into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). These initial codes were driven by the data and my interpretation of this, rather than being drawn out because of a relation to any particular theory.

Kelle (2004), has argued that use of computer software assists in the systematic process of coding. However, I chose to code data manually, as shown in Appendix 15. This approach allowed me to be more hands-on with the data and helped in my familiarisation with it. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), I endeavoured to make sure that my chosen codes were descriptive and fairly represented the full data set. To ensure a systematic approach I also kept track of all recorded codes and returned through these several times to determine whether they needed to be combined or were distinct from one another.

3.9.3.3 Finding themes

When all of the data had been systematically coded I started to search for broader themes that I perceived to be emerging from these. Again, I chose to complete this

process in a visual way, using mind-maps, colour coding and post-it notes. This allowed me to be more hands on with a data, present it visually, in a large space and was a personal preference over the use of a software coding programme. The process allowed for the exploration of over-arching, key themes, sub-themes, and the identification of codes which did not seem to fit with a specific theme. All themes identified within this process were linked to specific extracts and quotations from the data set.

An inductive approach was taken so that themes were directly relevant to the data and were based upon participant quotations. Themes were not linked to any pre-existing coding framework and I instead aimed to be data-driven. Throughout the data analysis I was aware that the identification of themes would be influenced by my own theoretical and epistemological stance. This links with the overarching social constructionist framework within which the current research was designed.

3.9.3.4 Refining themes

Themes were then refined, with some coming together and others needing to be broken down into separate themes, as shown in the various thematic maps (Appendix 17). It was necessary to carefully read through the data extracts for each theme to determine whether themes appropriately captured the detail within the quotations and formed a coherent pattern (Michael and Frederickson, 2013). Throughout this lengthy process, themes and codes were tweaked and adapted, so that they clearly represented the original data. In this stage, some themes were further divided into sub-themes.

3.9.3.5 Theme definitions

Once this had been achieved, I was able to name and define themes. This involved writing a description of each theme and sub-theme, including the story each theme told, and how this linked with the overall story I was understanding from the data.

Initially student interviews and staff focus group data were analysed independently, producing the thematic maps shown in Appendix 17. As there were many similarities and overlapping themes between the student and staff data, these themes were then combined through further analysis. This allowed for similarities and distinctions between student and staff perspectives to be explored and was considered to be the most appropriate way to present data after several drafts.

3.9.3.6 Sharing themes with Phase 2 focus group

At this stage, the themes were then brought back to staff members participating in the *Design* phase of the AI process, through the phase 2 focus group. Themes were shared with staff through a presentation (Appendix 19) and they were able to discuss and explore my identified themes from the data, before using these to develop their plans within the *Design* phase.

3.9.3.7 Written account

The final stage of the data analysis was to produce a written account of the thematic analysis, providing a detailed and coherent version of all of the information gathered from the data. Direct quotations and extracts from the student interviews and staff focus groups were used throughout, to demonstrate the themes, and to embed the analysis, in a narrative which could move readers beyond a merely descriptive understanding of the data, towards an understanding of factors relating to the overarching research questions explored earlier within this chapter.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical mindfulness is central to practice and research within Educational Psychology and throughout the completion of this research I have been aware of identifying and responding to ethical issues. The research was granted ethical approval by the University of Bristol, School of Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 18) and followed guidance defined by the British Psychological Society (2014).

The following sections will explore ethical considerations which arose in the completion of this research.

3.10.1 Informed consent

Kvale (2008), has highlighted the importance of gathering informed consent. All participants were told about the study, by me, through a PowerPoint (Appendix 4), and were given the opportunity to ask questions. As young people participating in the study were predominantly under the age of 16, and could be considered part of a vulnerable group, care was taken to confirm that they knew what the research was about, what participation would involve, and how this information would be used.

Staff, students and parents received an information sheet about the research, as well as letters explaining participation (Appendix 5, 7, 9, 11). The letter included contact information for the researcher should anyone have any concerns or questions, and also, identified a lead staff member within the AP who could answer questions about the study.

All participants were required to provide fully informed consent (Appendix 8, 10, 12) prior to participation, as recommended by Garner, Wagner and Kawulich (2009). Once parental consent had been obtained, young people were asked to sign their own consent form in front of me, allowing them to meet with me again to hear about the study in more detail, including information about confidentiality and anonymity. This gave a further option for withdrawal.

Consent was seen to be an on-going process. Staff in the focus group were informed that because of the nature of the recording, their views could not be individually withdrawn from the data. It was suggested that they could leave the focus group at any time or choose not to continue speaking. Similarly, students were told that they could stop the interview at any time and could withdraw from the study. Students were told that they could choose to withdraw their data from the study by a certain date (see Appendix 9). I also carefully monitored student responses to questions during the interviews as recommended by Haverkamp (2005).

3.10.2 Confidentiality

BPS guidance states that participants have the right for their data to be treated confidentially to protect anonymity (BPS, 2014). To protect confidentiality all data collection and storage, followed guidance from the University of Bristol. Furthermore, I transcribed all of the data myself, using pseudonyms throughout. Within this research all student and staff names have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms, including those referred to in quotations. The LA in which the research took place, and the name of the provision, have also been withheld to protect the identities of participants.

Limitations to confidentiality were explained to all participants, for example students were told that should I think they, or someone else, were at risk of harm, I would have to pass this information on to someone else, and should that be the case, I would let them know that I was going to do so (Munro, 2001).

3.10.3 Risk of harm

To protect participants' interests, all data collection timings were arranged to be convenient for participants so that interviews and focus groups did not disrupt important events or learning opportunities. For example, staff focus groups took place during already scheduled staff meeting hours. Student interviews took place in a familiar room and they were encouraged to sit wherever they liked. Further safeguarding considerations and information about the potential identified risks were considered within the Ethical Approval form which was approved by the University of Bristol as seen in Appendix 18.

Chapter 4 - Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the current study and is arranged into the following sections:

1. The first section will explore findings from the *Discovery* phase of the AI cycle, through thematic analysis of individual student interviews and phase 1 staff focus groups.
2. The second section will then focus on findings from the *Dream* phase of the AI cycle, again through thematic analysis of student interviews and phase 1 staff focus group data.
3. The final section will focus on the *Design* phase, in which staff in the phase 2 focus group, developed an action plan based upon the themes identified within the first two stages of the AI cycle.

The names of participants and other people mentioned within quotations have been anonymised with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Braun and Clarke (2013), suggest that robust qualitative research requires the researcher to recognise when quotations add value to the research questions and recommend that reporting on numbers of participants who discuss similar topics, lends itself more to quantitative research paradigms. In line with this suggestion, I have chosen not to report the number of participants who discussed each topic. Themes were chosen for their richness of data, rather than because a specific number of participants mentioned that topic.

4.2 The Discovery Phase

A thematic map representing the *Discovery* phase of the AI cycle, generated from student interviews and phase 1 staff focus groups, is shown in Figure 3. In the *Discovery* phase, staff and students were encouraged to discuss positive experiences with a focus on “appreciating the best of what is” (Hammond, 2013).

In the following sections a definition of each theme is provided to give the reader an understanding of what the chosen thematic title represents. Individual sub-themes will then be described, analysed, and illustrated using direct quotations from participant interviews and focus groups.

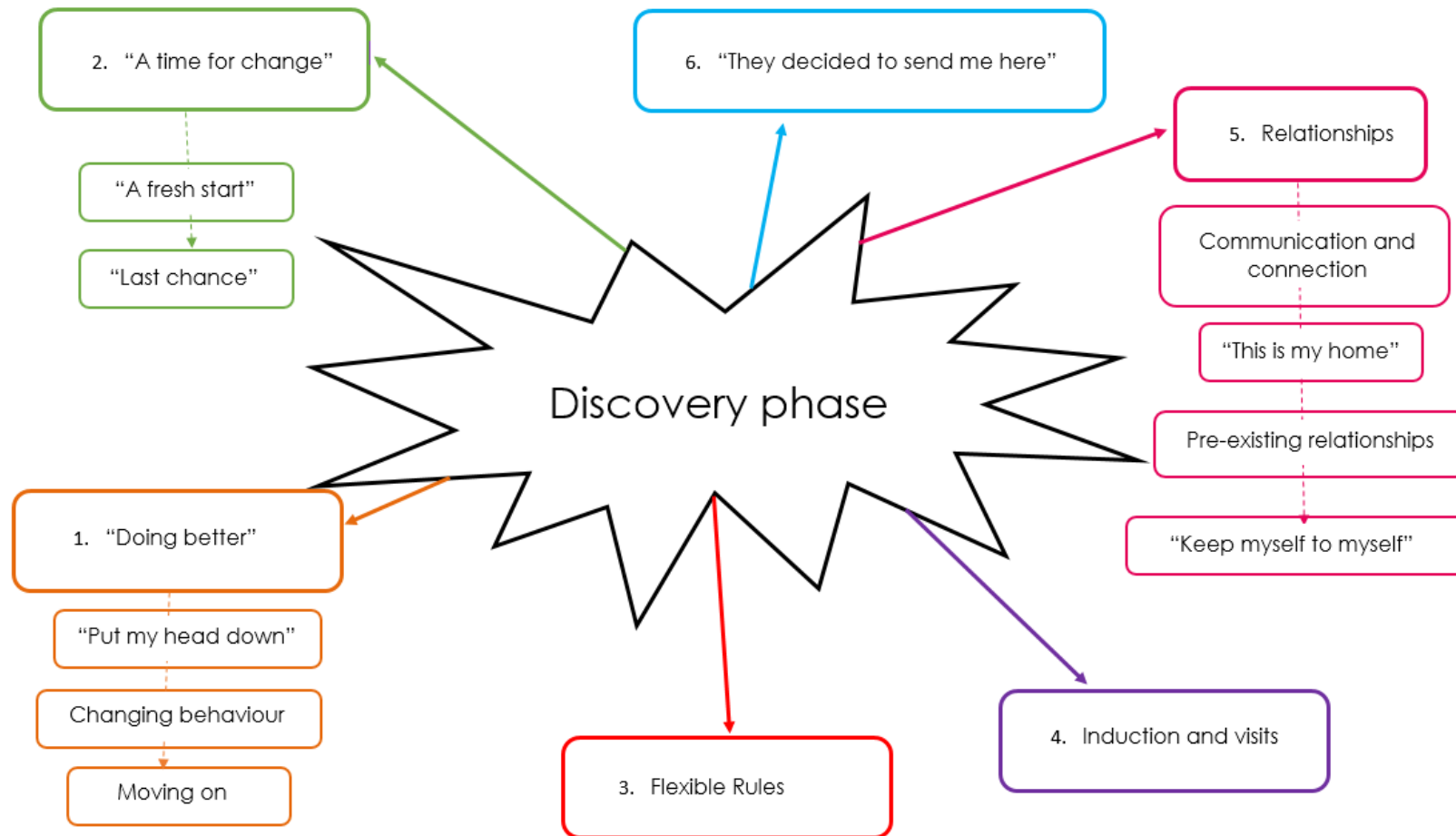


Figure 3: Thematic map of themes drawn from the Discovery phase of student interviews and staff focus groups.

4.2.1 Discovery Theme 1: A time for change

The first theme identified from the data has been titled: A time for change. This theme describes how young people transitioning into AP saw this as an opportunity to start again in their education. For some young people the change was seen as a “fresh start”, whereas for others, moving to AP felt like their “last chance”. These two descriptions will therefore be explored within the following sub-themes. Student and staff views linked with each sub-theme will be described in turn.

Sub-theme 1.1: Perception of a “fresh start”

Student views

Young people spoke of seeing the move into AP as a “new beginning” (Katy) and a chance to change what their education had been like up to that point.

“I just like decided to change it and make it better for me and just like make a new start, no one really knew me here... so it’s just easier to come, fresh start clean slate.” (Jessica)

It appeared that being able to move on to a new setting, where there were no pre-conceived ideas or expectations of how young people might be, was empowering for young people in beginning to make changes and break away from past patterns of behaviour.

Students related this perception of being able to “start again” to staff expectations of them,

“It was nice to like, start again...he (the teacher) just started from the beginning.” (Zoe)

This concept was often referred to in relation to the young people’s academic abilities and there was a sense throughout that going back to basics in key subjects such as Maths and English was helpful, rather than staff having an expectation that students could immediately begin work at a higher level.

“...they took me in and they found out...I gave them my GCSE maths book, revision book, and they were just like, “it’s ok we don’t need that” and I liked that coz I didn’t get it anyway!” (Shannon)

Similarly, young people spoke of staff at the AP being able to identify their individual learning needs both informally, “Janet realised I couldn’t read properly” (Shannon) and through formal arrangements as part of the transition process.

Alex for example, described completing a range of assessments with the SENCo during his first few days at the AP,

“Like tick box things...and then some things about reading...to see if I could read the right stuff for my GCSE and that.” (Alex)

The need for staff at the AP to identify and assess student academic needs suggested that this information had not been shared by the students’ previous settings.

Notably, students did not mention their feelings of staff having knowledge of expectations around other aspects such as their family background, personal interests or behaviour, and instead focused only on academic expectations.

Staff views

A similar theme emerged from staff focus group data. For some, it was vital to have detailed information about young people to prepare for their transition, whereas others preferred to not know too much about the young people in order to provide a feeling of a “fresh start”.

Staff discussed the importance of being given information from previous settings prior to young people starting at the AP and there was a shared view that generally information was more useful when provided in person by staff from previous settings, rather than through paperwork. For staff, this prior knowledge of students appeared to focus on their individual personalities and behavioural histories,

“I always prefer to speak to the TA, like what makes him kick off and that, so you can be prepared.”

Paper-based information was seen to be much less useful, in part because this did not always arrive in time, and because support staff rarely had the opportunity to read through and find the information they had been looking for. There was also often a difficulty in finding information when young people had been out of school for a long period prior to joining the AP,

“He was out of school for what, six months, no nearly a year I think before we got him? So then there isn’t anyone to ask and it’s, you just have to start again don’t you?”

There was a difference in opinion between staff members as to how much information was needed. For some it was “essential” to have detailed information about each young person’s background,

“It helps us to give a personalised plan because we are aware of issues that have happened in the past, so we can put things in place to prevent that from happening... every member of staff gets to know about previous triggers.”

Whereas for others there was a feeling that only management needed to know detailed histories of each young person so that they could have a “fresh start” when they arrived at the AP.

“...only management know the reasons behind that, you know about home and that...we just know what they’re like and then it’s a fresh start. We don’t need to know everything.”

Notably, none of the staff explicitly mentioned needing a prior understanding of young people’s individual learning needs or academic background. Prior knowledge instead appeared to focus on personal background information such as family life, and on previous behavioural patterns or triggers, so that plans could be made to avoid or address these in the AP. The lack of detailed information regarding students’ academic backgrounds may explain why young people felt that staff at the AP did not have a strong expectation of their academic abilities when they first entered the AP setting.

Staff also described what they termed taking a “restorative approach” with young people.

“We don’t judge them on what they did yesterday, every day is a fresh start.”

“...every day, in fact more than that, every moment can be a fresh start, we don’t hold on to anything, like if they have a meltdown it’s ok we just move on.”

Sub-theme 1.2: “Last chance”

Student views

When talking about their first day in the AP, many of the young people expressed a sense of initial nervousness,

“I felt a little bit fainty on the day I started, and I thought, ‘keep it together, deep breaths’” (Shannon)

The students had all been through several changes of placement prior to their arrival at the AP. For some this had included managed moves to other mainstream schools, time in specialist settings, such as schools for young people with SEMH needs, as well as attending other AP settings. These experiences appeared to further reinforce young people's sense of uncertainty about joining the AP,

"I've gotta be honest mind, I didn't really think it would be any good, I thought it'd be shit. Everywhere else I've been was shit so I thought it'd be the same" (Patrick)

It was perhaps because of young people's numerous changes of placement, that whilst many described moving to the AP as "a fresh start", some also spoke of how they saw this as their "last chance" and had a sense that there would be no other available options should this placement fail.

"...if I get kicked out of here there's pretty much nowhere for me to go."
(Alex)

Similarly to viewing the move to AP as "a fresh start" however, seeing this as a "last chance" appeared to support young people's perception of this being a time in which they could begin making changes in their attendance at school, general behaviour and in their academic progress.

Staff views

Staff working in the AP were aware of the sense of pressure that seeing AP as a "last chance" could have on young people joining the AP,

"When they first start here, there's a lot of pressure you know? For lots of them they feel like it's their last chance and actually they've been told that by a lot of people, and there's nowhere else for them to go."

Staff felt that they were skilled in relieving some of this pressure and could encourage the students to try their best without this being overwhelming. They described reducing the demands on young people and giving them time to get used to things in their new setting. Staff described how they made sure to communicate the message to young people that joining the AP could be a positive experience and could be a chance for a new beginning,

“When we get someone new in we let them know that we aren’t judging them on what’s happened before and that they do have a real opportunity here, because we won’t give up on them.”

Summary of Discovery Theme 1: A time for change

Both students and staff described the power of seeing the transition into AP as an opportunity for a new beginning and this was seen to be facilitated by young people perceiving the move as a “fresh start”.

Whilst some staff valued having prior knowledge of student behaviour and personal information, there seemed to be a consensus between staff and students that students should be given the chance to start again academically, without the need for sharing of information about their prior attainment. Instead, academic needs were assessed once young people arrived in the AP.

Finally, as many of the young people had experienced several educational placements before arriving at the AP, many saw this as their last option, which led to a feeling of pressure and worry about what would happen should this placement fail. Nevertheless, students in this study shared a sense that joining the AP was an opportunity for change.

4.2.2 Discovery Theme 2: “They decided to send me here”

This theme explores staff and young people’s perception of the decision-making processes around attending AP.

Student views

For the majority, there had been no involvement in the decision-making process and many expressed a feeling that decisions had been made without consulting them. Student accounts presented how young people felt decision making was enforced upon them, rather than made with them,

“That was until they decided to send me here.” (Jack)

Those who had not been involved in the decision making expressed that they would have liked to have had more involvement and to talk through different options,

“My mum did, it was alright but yeah it would be good to have a choice.”
(Tyreece)

Whereas others concluded that although they hadn’t had a choice, this was because of the limited range of options available,

“Well to be fair it’s not like they could say do you wanna go here or not, I’ve already been everywhere else, so this is it innit!” (Patrick)

Students often appeared to have been unaware of how and when decisions had been made and many could not describe how, when or by whom the decision to attend that AP had been made.

On the other hand, some students spoke of attending meetings and being asked to give their opinion on attending the AP following a visit there,

“We had a meeting... they just said to me, “do you...wanna move or stay?”, and I said, “yeah I would like that” coz I was aiming and my grades were getting so much better and I was just working hard here.” (Jessica)

“We went here for a meeting and Pam said, “Would you like a place lovely?” I said, “Yes please!”” (Shannon)

Staff views

Staff in focus groups did not describe young people being involved in the decision-making process around attendance at the AP and suggested that they too had little understanding of the decision-making processes or involvement in this.

“We don’t tend to be involved, we find out who is coming a few days before maybe. All that is done by the Head and the Local Authority I guess.”

Summary of Discovery Theme 2: “They decided to send me here”

Little information was known about how decisions had been made about young people moving in to AP. None of the students in this study spoke of being involved in the decision as to which setting they would move to or being asked to give their views on a range of options.

Some students felt that this was because they had attended all other options, and so there had been no choices left. Other young people had been asked if they wanted a place at the AP following an initial visit. In these cases, all of those asked had indicated that they would like to stay and so it is unknown from the data what would have happened should the young person have declined.

Staff involved in the focus group also had little knowledge of how the decisions were made and there was an overall feeling that this was an opaque process, often led by management teams and staff from the Local Authority.

4.2.3 Discovery Theme 3: Relationships

The overarching theme of relationships was key for both students and staff. Both spoke of the importance of building trusting and positive relationships, and attachments between staff and students.

The first two sub-themes (3.1: Communication and connection; and 3.2 “This is my home”) present views of both students and staff. The following two sub-themes (3.3: Pre-existing relationships; and 3.4: “Keeping myself to myself”) only represent the views of students as these themes were not covered in staff focus groups.

Sub-theme 3.1: Communication and Connection

Student views

Young people expressed a perception of being genuinely valued by staff at the AP and accepted for being themselves.

Some explicitly mentioned a lack of judgement from staff, Jessica for example repeated this theme on several occasions,

“...like they don’t judge, which is a big thing for me, they don’t judge me as a person, they just help.” (Jessica)

Students perceived that staff accepted them as they were, and this appeared to reduce the pressure young people felt in their learning, as well as offering an opportunity to open up about personal difficulties and begin to accept support from others.

Young people felt that the staff in the AP genuinely liked them and would stand up for them,

“...she like won’t let a bad word be said about me and that’s cool.” (Jack)

This enabled students to build trust in the adults supporting them,

“I think obviously to learn that like, you can trust other people, like people can be trusted. Coz I have a big issue with trust, like people can be there for you, people can support you, like you don’t have to do it by yourself.” (Jessica)

“I know people are here to help me.” (Alex)

As well as being trustworthy, staff within AP were often described by students as being “fun” and young people expressed an appreciation that staff would get involved in activities such as games at break times or having fun on trips out.

“The staff are more different...to the ones in school, they play games at lunch time and break...They’re fun, that’s it really, they’re fun.” (Tyreece)

Staff members were described as “making jokes” and being “smiley”. This appeared to contrast with how students had perceived staff in mainstream settings.

“She’s actually a laugh to be fair, like she’s always smiling and in a good mood...she is just fun. She will make jokes and that to wind me up. It’s more chill, like in my old school it was always so serious.” (Patrick).

Students felt able to build personal connections with staff and appreciated reciprocal sharing of personal interests,

“I suppose I can just talk to them... and they just do the same... Its close, which is nice, that you can just talk to somebody” (Katy)

For others, being able to talk about their emotions, home situation and things they were finding difficult was important,

“she always asks how I’m getting on and about home and that...I can just like send her a text if I don’t want to actually talk, and she’ll give me a hug and talk to me when I’m ready.” (Zoe)

All of the student participants had been allocated a keyworker within the AP and each spoke fondly of that relationship. It was evident from the interviews that students valued having someone to confide in and that they appreciated having someone to stop and take the time to listen.

Staff views

“I think one of the most important things is building that relationship with the key worker.”

Like students, staff also acknowledged the importance of relationship building with young people and described how the types of interaction they had with students during their initial visits and first few days in the AP were important in supporting a successful transition. Echoing the views of students, staff spoke of developing

“respectful” relationships. They identified the importance of encouraging young people to try their best without making them feel “under too much pressure” and suggested that the AP was seen as a “safe place”.

Staff frequently referred to the use of key workers, high staff to student ratios, and being able to offer 1:1 support, as being key to the effectiveness of their work in the AP. They described how students who were new to the AP immediately met their key worker, spending time with them during initial visits or having key workers visit in their previous setting.

“...we get to meet them straight away because it’s all about the relationships for these kids”

Staff reported that being able to provide 1:1 support allowed them to, “really get to know” the students. This was felt to be important as it allowed young people to know that there were people available to listen to them and offered a sense of security.

Staff felt that they were able to be more patient, had more time to listen, and could therefore help young people with their emotional needs, because the curriculum was generally less demanding, and small groups led to less disruption for other pupils. AP staff felt that they could be more accepting of students’ emotional needs than mainstream staff as they were better resourced to offer empathy and patience to support young people in this way.

“We have more time...to sit and listen, to keep trying. If they kick off here they’re not disrupting 30 other kids, we can just take them aside and it’s not an issue, they can calm down and we can wait and listen.”

Staff defined relationships with students as “genuine” and having “no judgement”. “Humour” was also identified as being fundamental in supporting students within the AP to settle to learning and again appeared to reflect what the students had said about staff being “fun”.

The concept of trust was further extended through staffs’ perception of providing a “safe place” for students. They explained that they aimed to promote a feeling of safety by offering young people “choices and reasons” instead of “telling them off”. Staff felt that safety was of particular importance to those young people who had

experienced “difficult home” circumstances and made the AP a place where young people wanted to attend.

Throughout staff focus group discussions it was evident that staff had empathy for students attending the AP and wanted to understand how things were for each individual.

“You do end up getting attached to them, as difficult as they can be sometimes...you have to understand that they’ve been through a lot. When you can see where that anger and hurt is coming from, you can’t really take it to heart.”

This sense of empathy appeared to play a key role in the interactions that staff had with students and enabled communication and connection which led to the development of trusting relationships in which young people felt supported with their emotions.

Sub-theme 3.2: “This is my home”

Student views

One of the most apparent themes emerging from the student data was young people’s growing sense of belonging during their time at the AP. Paramount to this was the feeling that the AP represented a “family” for young people, in which they were able to develop positive and trusting relationships with adults. Students spoke positively about staff attitudes within the AP, often contrasting this to their mainstream experiences.

This sense of “family” stemmed from a comparison of family structures and roles, to those within the AP. For example, some of the young people highlighted how individual members of the staff team represented family members such as siblings, mums and aunties.

“Well there’s Jane, she’s like the big sister and then Shaun is like the brother and then there’s all of us and it’s like all aunties and that and then Sue is like the mum and she looks after us and tells us off!” (Katy)

Other students commented that staff reminded them of their own family members,

“He’s just so funny he reminds me of my step dad” (Shannon)

The environment or set-up of the AP was also reflective of a sense of “family”, with some students commenting that being in the AP was like being “home”,

“I like that it’s like a house here you know, there’s the kitchen and the sofas, so we can all just chill together like a family.” (Patrick)

“It feels like this is my house, like this is my home, they take me in... I belong here.” (Shannon)

One of the sites also had pet dogs which roamed about the building freely, that the students would sometimes take for a walk as a calming strategy. As with staff, comparisons were made between the dogs and family pets.

A further reinforcement of the “family” feeling, was that young people could refer to staff members on a first name basis. Many of the students spoke of preferring to do this and suggested that in mainstream school it had been difficult to remember staff names, which often caused them to get into trouble.

“I get along with teachers, they let me use their own names.” (Katy)

Another factor which appeared to relate to young people’s sense of family was the sharing of personal stories from staff,

“You get to know each other very quickly and they tell you all about their actual life, like they tell you about their own kids and what they’ve done at the weekend.” (Alex)

The small and often homely environment of the AP gave many of the young people a strong sense of familiarity, particularly with staff. Students spoke positively about their relationships within the AP and appeared to have built a sense of belonging, through a family environment built on principles of nurture, genuine interest and care.

Students spoke of feeling “welcome” and “wanted”, again reinforcing the importance of staff attitudes and relationships during their transition into AP,

“The day I started here I said you know what this college is amazing for me, I fit in it.” (Shannon)

“I really enjoyed it, coz it was a new start and it makes you feel like you’re wanted somewhere.” (Jessica)

This contrasted with descriptions of previous educational experiences in which many of the young people expressed a sense of feeling “kicked out” and isolated,

“...we had a unit off-site and I felt like I was worth nothing because we was just put off somewhere, no one ever really came down and spoke to us really.” (Jessica)

“...pretty much just always been sat in the pastoral support office or getting kicked out or getting sent home.” (Jack)

Staff views

As described in Section 3.1, staff were aware that many of the young people attending AP had experienced difficulties in their previous educational settings and saw themselves as being in a unique position when compared to staff from mainstream settings in being able to provide emotional support. They felt that students attending AP needed positive attention and care from adults, as this was not something they had typically received in mainstream settings.

“I would say they need that attention too because for so long in school the only attention they get is negative but with that 1:1 key worker they get someone who actually cares.”

Echoing the views offered by students, staff described having “respect” for young people attending the AP and treating them in a mature manner. They felt that this offered a more realistic experience and enabled them to build relationships with staff.

“...that makes this experience more authentic. They need to work with us as people and adults, I mean they know we’re teachers but we’re first names, not surnames. Smoking, wearing your own clothes, actually that does promote, I think it just means that it’s a more real relationship.”

Like the students, staff also referred to the AP setting having a “family feel” and described how differences in school rules, such as referring to staff by their first names, developed a sense of “equality and respect”.

Staff spoke enthusiastically about their keyworker roles and many described building close and caring relationships with individual young people. Like students, staff referred to young people as though they were family members,

“I honestly feel it’s like I’ve got another kid...I look after her in the same way, comfort her, sort her clothes out, tell her when she needs to be told, listen and give her advice. I even feed her!”

Whilst staff explained that the keyworker relationship was often “hard work”, they showed an appreciation of what was driving young people’s behaviours and spoke of being “committed” to supporting individual young people.

“It can get a bit intense you know...she’s fully dependent on me and its hard work because she pushes to test your limits...she just wants to know that you’ll still be there.”

Sub-theme 3.3: Pre-existing relationships

This sub-theme only explores the views of student participants as this theme did not arise in analysis of staff focus group data.

Student views

Closely linked with Sub-theme 1.1: Perception of a “fresh start”, some of the young people had experienced difficulty in their transition into the AP because of pre-existing relationships with other students.

“There was this kid here that I’ve never really got on with... he was messaging me saying like, “You’re going to get shit tomorrow in school, everyone in this school likes me and they’re not going to like you.”” (Jack)

For Jack, this led to a concern that he could be excluded from the AP before he had even had a chance to settle in,

“I think it was more of the fact that I just didn’t wanna come in on the first day and end up getting sent home coz I had a fight with someone.” (Jack)

Young people expressed that staff had sometimes been made aware of potential frictions between specific students through contact with parents or carers, and that this had helped in some way to reduce the likelihood of any difficulties arising,

“I don’t get on with her and they know that, so they just make sure there’s someone there to keep an eye, or they put us in different rooms and that.” (Katy)

On the other hand, pre-existing relationships could also offer students a sense of protection. Jack for example spoke of how family members had previously attended the AP,

“...a lot of people knew my brother, so it was like...I’ve got your brother’s back, so I’ve got your back.” (Jack)

Those that identified as having friends within the AP before their transition spoke positively about their transition experiences,

“Well I already knew Connor was here because he’s my mate from home so that was sweet.” (Patrick)

Sub-theme 3.4: “Keeping myself to myself”

This sub-theme also only explores the views of students, as staff did not comment on this theme.

Student views

Young people identified that the small group sizes within the AP could be a facilitator of friendships.

“Obviously it’s quite small so you end up, you meet friends quite, quicker than you would usually in mainstream.” (Jessica)

In spite of this, students commented that they often did not spend time with AP peers outside of school hours. For some this was due to geographical restrictions, as they lived in different home areas. There was also a sense that students did not necessarily want to spend additional time with students from the AP outside of school hours and that although they got on with peers during the school day, relationships had rarely developed in to what might be defined as a friendship.

“I mean I get along with most of the kids here, some of them are like annoying but I’ll be civil with ‘em” (Alex)

Some mentioned individual student backgrounds as being a difficulty,

“Obviously at school, other things happen at school and yeah people have different backgrounds at home and obviously I prefer just to...keep myself to myself outside school.” (Jessica).

Others identified that because the young people attending AP had their own needs or difficulties in some way, this could make building friendships more difficult,

“He’s a pain in the ass, he’s mean to people because he has a tough life, he has stuff in his life you know...Everybody here, they have problems like

stress...Much of them don't even help me or be kind to me, or get along"
(Shannon)

Summary of Discovery Theme 3: Relationships

Students and staff were positive about their relationships with one another and compared this to a feeling of "family". It was apparent through many of their descriptions about relationships with staff in AP that students experienced kindness, nurture and genuine interest, which enabled them to develop a sense of trust in adults. From a staff perspective these relationships took patience, commitment and hard work.

Staff were able to build positive relationships through a dedication to treating young people respectfully, being there to listen when young people needed them to, and by keeping the school day fun and positive. Communication and connection between staff and students appeared to provide a sense of belonging within the AP.

Contrasting to this however, were young people's descriptions of peer relationships within the AP. Whilst many spoke of enjoying some activities during the school day with peers, few appeared to have made any sustaining friendships. Furthermore, whilst AP staff were compared favourably to the relationships young people had had with mainstream staff, students spoke less positively about their relationships with peers in AP than those they had had with young people in mainstream settings.

Students also spoke of the impact pre-existing relationships had on their initial transition into AP. When there had been a negative relationship with another young person in the AP, this added to young person's worry about joining. Likewise, positive pre-existing relationships enhanced the transition experience.

4.2.4 Discovery Theme 4: Induction and visits

The fourth over-arching theme identified from staff and student data is that of induction and visits.

Student views

When talking about their transition into the AP, many of the students described having initial visits to the setting and how these had helped to calm their nerves,

“I really enjoyed it...I came with my mate and this other teacher and then my auntie came with me and I really liked it here it was like fun” (Jessica)

Describing their initial visits, for many of the young people there was an importance placed upon meeting members of staff such as their key worker, and immediately beginning to form positive relationships with staff.

The girls, in particular, spoke about physical contact with members of staff, such as a “hug” when they first arrived. Students also frequently described being given special food or drinks upon their arrival, such as a “cup of tea” or “an ice-lolly”.

Young people appeared to value attending the visit with a family member, who often joined them in a meeting with management staff from the AP.

Some students struggled to recall their visit and suggested that this was just like a normal school day with the addition of a tour around the building.

Some initially started their placement at the AP on a split timetable, spending some days in mainstream and the rest in AP.

“you were going to school like mainstream school, then you were going and coming here, and it was completely different...it was just weird, they’re both different.” (Jessica)

This seemed to be difficult for the students to manage, and many described how the differences in expectations between the mainstream and AP settings was at times confusing. Those students who were initially on a split-timetable mentioned how they quickly wanted to spend an increasing amount of time in the AP, rather than in mainstream,

“The day I started here I said you know what this college is amazing for me, I fit in it. I said, “umm Pam can I just speak to you?” and asked for extra hours.” (Shannon)

“...like I came here for the two days...by the third day I was in already...Pam had sort of like, sorted it out in those two days, just so I could stay here for the rest of the week.” (Jessica)

Whilst students described coming in to get to know staff and the building, they rarely mentioned meeting other peers from the AP during their initial visit. They also gave little information about the meetings they had attended during their visit and there was a sense that although they attended a meeting, they played a limited role in the discussion. The information provided by students also indicated that the majority immediately began their placement in the AP following their initial visit, either on the following day or week.

Staff views

Staff described about the importance of young people having visits to the AP prior to starting their placements and described how they believed some young people had had a successful transition because of a “phased start”.

Staff suggested that all students were offered an initial visit to meet with key staff and to become familiar with the setup of the AP such as the layout of the building. They explained that students were either accompanied by staff from their previous setting or attended with family members/carers, and that this was a useful time to share information about the individual.

Reflecting student data, little information was given about the structure of initial visits, and the majority seemed to follow a typical day at the AP, learning the layout of the building and meeting key staff members.

There was a belief that the visits were helpful in ascertaining whether or not a placement at the AP would be suitable for the young person, however, no stories were told about young people who had visited but not been deemed suitable, and the visits appeared to be more of a formality in the transition process.

“Yeah that’s like when it’s decided really if it will work or not...The place is all basically agreed but they have to come and meet the staff you know, see what it’s like here before they start.”

The meetings which students attended with family members or school staff, were generally held with management, rather than keyworkers and teachers who participated in the study and so little further information was given about what this entailed.

Staff described how they took a gentle approach to students' transition,

"when they come here those first few days it's all new and we just let them settle in slowly. If they don't want to go to a lesson or something, we give them a bit of time alone... and say, "you know it's ok to find it scary or hard, let's just go and sit in there, you don't have to write anything, we will just sit and listen."

Along with initial visits, staff explained that young people would often have a "phased start". One staff member described how this had been successful for a young person who had initially struggled in joining activities at the AP,

"One I think went really well... well I think the thing that helped was...it was decided that she was only going to come...one day a week at first ...and that meant we could build it up small, bit by bit."

Phased starts were suggested to be effective in supporting the transition of those who were out of education before joining the AP.

"...coming here one or two days a week at first. I think it just gives them time to get used to it...to build in to being here. I think because she'd been out of school that made a difference, like the expectations on her from being at home to coming in all day every day was too much, she couldn't cope, so she needed that."

However, whilst phased starts appeared to have been successful for some, particularly when they did not attend another setting, staff did not agree that this was always helpful for young people, echoing views given from young people that often, splitting time between mainstream school and the AP presented challenges,

"...if they come here and are still going back to the school they keep getting kicked out of, it just doesn't seem to do 'em any favours"

“It’s like they don’t have the chance to fully thrive and settle because they’ve still got that negativity about school.”

Summary of Discovery Theme 4: Induction and visits

Initial visits to the AP, prior to starting a placement, typically involved a normal school day and a tour of the building. Some students recalled special food or drink and girls spoke of physical contact with staff such as hugs. The importance of relationships was again highlighted and both staff and students spoke of immediately beginning a relationship between student and keyworker.

Phased starts were considered to be effective for those young people who had been out of education for some time, in supporting their transition into AP. Conversely, for young people who were continuing to attend another setting, splitting time between two educational establishments was difficult because of differences in expectation. This was also perceived to be ineffective as young people continued to experience negativity towards their education.

4.2.5 Discovery Theme 5: Flexible Rules

The AP did not reprimand students for breaking rules in the same way as young people had experienced in mainstream settings. Staff in AP made allowances for young people to swear, wear their own clothing, have cigarette breaks, and to call staff by first names. This theme has therefore been titled: Flexible Rules.

Student views

Students described how they were less likely to get in to trouble in the AP setting than they had been in other schools because of relaxed rules around use of language, uniform and smoking.

Patrick for example, commented that allowing students to wear their own clothes removed a potential reason for being sent home.

“In my old school we had to wear uniform and everyone was always getting sent home all the time for wearing the wrong thing and it’s just a waste of time.” (Patrick)

Students could wear their own clothes and most of them brought this up during their interviews. Being allowed to wear their own clothes appeared to be important to many of the young people because it allowed them to express their individual identity and be themselves.

“...in uniform you’re meant to look all the same, dress all the same and it’s, you’re not that person” (Jessica)

One of the students, Jack, commented on the potential for bullying relating to wearing own clothes instead of a uniform. He said,

“here you can just wear what’s comfortable and it’s like, you just get to be yourself...like you can’t do that in some schools coz people will get bullied about their clothes... But it’s like people wouldn’t actually pick on people about their clothes...like not everyone’s like some little rich kids that walks round in Armani clothes like rich people.” (Jack)

Not wearing uniform not only allowed young people to express themselves as an individual, but also made many of the students feel more “comfortable” and reduced the chance of missing out on their education because they had not followed

rules about school uniform. In this way, being allowed to wear their own clothes removed barriers to school attendance.

Staff views

Staff also acknowledged that students appreciated the allowances made for smoking and wearing their own clothing. There was a feeling that this encouraged students to focus on their education, rather than being reprimanded for breaking rules.

“A lot of them probably got told off for smoking at school and swearing and all that and we don’t necessarily agree with it, but we allow it because we know that actually the long-term goal is for them to get their education and stay in school.”

Similarly to students, staff commented that wearing their own clothes allowed students to be themselves,

“It’s also breaking the school norms, we don’t have any uniform so they can turn up and be themselves...basically the rules of school, you know are taken away, so it’s more of, there’s, there’s realistic targets here that they can meet.”

Staff felt that this served to “break the formality of what schooling is” and facilitated young people to perceive joining the AP as a new and different experience, enabling them to move away from “past failures”.

The flexibility of school rules was also seen to be helpful in building relationships with young people,

“But I think the point is, that makes this experience more authentic. They need to work with us as people and adults, I mean they know we’re teachers but were first names not surnames, smoking, wearing your own clothes, actually that does promote, I think it just means that it’s a more real relationship.”

Staff described accepting young people as they were and going on a journey with them from that point. Whilst they did not always agree with the choices or behaviours of students, they described tackling these issues “alongside” students rather than “dictating what they have to do”.

Summary of Discovery Theme 5: Flexible Rules

There was a perception from both students and staff that having more relaxed rules around areas such as uniform, swearing, and smoking, gave young people more chance to engage with education, as they were less likely to be sent home for rule-breaking behaviour.

Being able to wear their own clothes also allowed young people to feel as though they were being themselves and to express their own identity.

The flexible rules were also perceived to be treating young people maturely and respectfully, which was considered helpful in building trusting relationships between staff and students in the AP.

4.2.6 Discovery Theme 6: “Doing better”

Students spoke about the progress they had made since joining the AP, relating this to both academic and personal progress, including improvements in behaviour and attendance. These views were also shared by staff who spoke of how much the young people achieved during their time in AP. Readiness to leave AP was also discussed in both student interviews and staff focus groups, often exploring the topic of a potential return to mainstream settings.

The theme “Doing better”, a quote from one of the students, has been divided into three sub-themes to cover these areas: “Put my head down”, Changing Behaviour and Moving On.

Sub-theme 6.1: “Put my head down”

Student views

Students spoke positively about their learning within the AP. For some it was difficult to describe what exactly that they had found helpful, although there was a feeling that learning was easier in the AP than it had been in previous settings,

“I find it easier to learn here, coz it just is easier.” (Tyreece)

The students described being in AP as a positive learning experience, and many said that they had been able to progress more than they had in mainstream settings, describing a sense of pride in their own achievements. Young people often referred to “proving” themselves to others,

“Just I proved to everybody and myself that I can do it. If I put my head to it, I can do it and yeah, so it, I was very proud of myself.” (Jessica)

Like Jessica, a number of young people related their progress to “putting their heads down”.

“I just put my head down and get on with it. I can sit in a quiet room and just get it done, then it only takes half the time and I’ve finished it.” (Alex).

“I think I’m going to do alright in my GCSEs. The last exam thing we did I only got 2 questions wrong. So I know I can do it if I put my head down.” (Patrick).

Students related “putting their heads down” to a growing sense of self-belief, and an ability to block out what was going on around them, facilitated by smaller class sizes and generally “less busy” learning environments.

Students were offered monetary incentives for having a positive attitude in lessons and for making progress which seemed to motivate them,

“I was getting a lot of vouchers...like 25 quid every time”! (Jessica)

Similarly, trips and visits as a group to places such as “air-hop” and the cinema, were seen as a motivating reward, as were certificates and trophies, or being given an enjoyable activity,

“I like it ‘coz if I do really well in my lessons then I can watch a film” (Shannon)

“It’s alright ‘coz if I go to my lessons and do the work then we go out and do like go-carting or something.” (Tyreece).

Students valued having 1:1 support, not only because this allowed them to build a supportive relationship with a key adult, but also as this enabled them to work at their own pace,

“They do at my own pace, if I want to go slow, they do it slow, if I want to go fast then I can do it fast.” (Shannon)

Small group sizes were frequently cited as helping young people in their learning. Students spoke of finding it easier to focus in a smaller group. Shannon for example described how in a mainstream classroom she,

“...couldn’t even cope. It was really hard, and I got stressed out with people.” (Shannon)

Similarly, Zoe described how,

“It’s like way better than like, have like 30, 40, 50 people in that class, you have like 5 or 3... so much easier to concentrate.” (Zoe)

Young people also referred to beginning to see the importance of core subjects,

“Then this year I kind of realised that I need Maths...you still need to know like how to add your money up, how much like your bills are going to take out of your wages...Like obviously I understand I’m going to need science, English and Maths.” (Jack)

Several young people spoke about making progress with key skills such as reading and writing during their time at the AP,

“I’m doing better in my lessons...My reading was absolutely terrible but now it’s getting better... Janet realised I couldn’t read properly so we’ve been reading in class.” (Shannon)

“Well they like, coz obviously I’m a bit dyslexic and stuff, they gave me a go and helped me to read and stuff like that...they’re always like just, spelling doesn’t matter just, just try, don’t worry about it.” (Jessica)

As shown in the quotes above, progress was closely linked to staff in the AP identifying young people’s individual needs and offering targeted support in these areas.

Learning styles also frequently arose in discussion with students, and many described how AP staff were able to support their learning by trying a range of different approaches,

“Obviously everybody learns in different types of styles anyway...it’s just finding the right way to teach you yourself, which I like here.” (Jessica)

“I’m quite a visual learner so someone has to keep showing me for me to actually learn it ... if I can’t see it, I just don’t understand it” (Katy)

It seemed that many of the young people had been told at some stage that they were a particular type of learner and that they had begun to identify themselves in this way.

Many students also expressed a growing sense of resilience in their learning and a belief that they could progress and achieve. Again, relationships with staff were integral to young people’s developing resilience, as well as being able to progress at an appropriate pace.

“...learning is something that you do in time, like you learn things in life and you generally get knocked back, but you still learn and carry on, keep going.” (Jessica)

“I still find it hard and I don’t know what to do, but now I can keep coming back to it because we’ve got more time and like if I’m really stuck, then Janice will help me, like she talks it through and she makes me think about it a different way.” (Zoe)

Staff views

Staff spoke positively about young people’s progress since joining AP and shared the view that taking an individual approach to supporting young people had enhanced student learning and overall progress within the AP.

“I mean think how far she has come and a lot of that, I think is because she’s had that 1:1, someone to actually listen to her and to understand her as an individual, she was always capable of being like she is now...we didn’t even know she couldn’t read really before she got here, so doing those assessments and working with her 1:1 to build up her skills, that’s what’s made the difference.”

As in the above quotation, the concept of individual support was often related to the identification of student strengths and needs, echoing the student perspective that staff in AP understood how to best support their learning.

“We build their confidence and self-esteem, that’s the 1:1 and Thrive⁵ activities. I suppose it’s an individualised programme that helps them to succeed, so we find their areas of weakness and we actually target them.”

Like students, staff often referred to the importance of working 1:1 to identify learning needs and adapt support appropriately. They did not explicitly refer to students having individual learning styles and instead made comments such as,

“...we know she has to watch to be able to do it.”

⁵ Thrive is an approach based upon attachment theory, child development and neuroscience to support children and young people in their social and emotional development <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

Unlike students, staff did not mention reward systems as increasing student motivation and instead related an improvement in student engagement to staff “boosting their confidence” and “taking the pressure off”.

Staff also described building young people’s resilience through the feedback given in learning situations,

“We don’t say, “wrong do it again.” Instead we say, “ok not quite right, so here’s how we can do it.””

Sub-theme 6.2: Changing Behaviour

Student views

As well as identifying progress they had made in their academic skills, many of the young people spoke about how their behaviour had positively changed since joining the AP. As with learning, this was frequently be attributed to smaller group sizes and staff allowing students sufficient time to calm down.

“I haven’t really kicked off here...Its just being in a small school...I think the biggest group I’ve been in in here is about 5 people if that.” (Jack)

“Don’t get me wrong, I still do kick off, but it feels different now. Like I don’t get sent home every day and I can just speak to Janice and calm down in my own time, there’s not someone nagging on at me to get back to class.” (Zoe)

There was a shared feeling among many of the students that some young people were treated differently in regard to their behaviour, and students appreciated staff taking an individualised approach in allowing them to calm down,

“They don’t treat you all the same, they like know that you have different needs or whatever, and it’s like some people’s way of calming down is having a hot chocolate and some people’s way of calming down is having a fag, which a lot of the time they’re very lenient with.” (Jack)

However, some expressed a sense of injustice as a consequence of staff taking an individual approach. For example, in how some student behaviours were managed,

“I think like there is definitely favouritism that goes on...there’s a little year 8, I don’t understand how she gets so many points she’s always screaming shouting.” (Jack)

Notably, the AP did not use any form of restraint to manage behaviour, however, some of the students had previously attended settings in which this had taken place. These students commented that often physical restraint had caused their behaviour to escalate and that being allowed their own space to calm down within the AP had been helpful in reducing aggressive responses,

“In my old school, it was like a school for naughty people yeah... if I kicked off they would instantly have like 2 or 3 people on me, like holding my arms and that so I couldn’t hit out or kick... that just makes you want to do it more coz they’ve got their hands all on you... here I just walk out, chill on the sofa and it’s fine.” (Alex)

Staff views

Staff shared similar views to students regarding the management of student behaviour in that they acknowledged that young people needed an individual approach, but that this was often perceived to be unfair. Staff commented that students could not always understand when staff had differing expectations for individual young people.

Smaller group sizes were not mentioned in reference to the improvement of young people’s behaviour, which had been cited as a significant factor by young people. Instead staff spoke of how the emotional support offered through close relationships with staff was effective in managing student behaviour.

Emotional support was often linked with additional therapeutic approaches such as “Thrive” or “Art therapy” and staff perceived that these approaches had been effective in understanding why young people might have been responding in a particular way.

“It’s thinking about what’s behind the behaviour, we reflect on why, we get behind all that to address why they might be the way they are through different therapies...It’s challenging the thoughts of themselves, they might not necessarily think about.”

Staff also described the importance of teaching young people coping strategies and ways in which they could take control of their own behaviour,

“...they’re more likely to be able to cope because they’ll be more confident and things that would have bothered them before, it’s not going to have the same impact and they’ll have strategies to calm down.”

As reflected within the student data, staff said that offering a trusting relationship, with time and space for young people to calm down, was essential in supporting young people to develop an understanding of their own behaviour.

Like students, staff acknowledged that, when issues arose, these typically linked to disagreements between young people in the setting. They also explained that students would be temporarily excluded for breaking of rules such as damaging property or bringing illegal substances onto the site.

Sub-theme 6.3: Moving On

Student views

In discussion with management at the AP I was told that 6 of the 8 young people interviewed were expected to remain in the AP setting until it was time for them to move on to Post 16 provision. The other 2 were expected to stay in the AP for the remainder of the academic year, before considering the appropriateness of returning to mainstream.

All of the students suggested that they would like to remain in the AP setting, rather than returning to a mainstream school,

“It’s alright here, I’d rather be here than school.” (Katy)

Some were passionate that they would never go back to their previous school,

“Nah, there’s no fucking way I’d go back there, not a chance. It was shit and they was always kicking me out, they wouldn’t let me back anyway and I would tell them to fuck off if they did.” (Patrick)

Students expressed feelings of rejection from their previous settings, often referring to being “kicked out” and “not wanted”. They described not getting on with mainstream school staff and a preference for the close relationships they had built with staff from the AP.

Some did not feel ready to leave the AP and were apprehensive about re-joining large group sizes and busy environments,

“I wish I could stay here for another year coz college is too big and hectic and like I can’t even cope... I just wanna stay here for another year.” (Shannon)

Others felt prepared for their next transition and were keen to move on to other types of learning or beginning their careers,

“It’s guna be sad but...you grow out of it, I feel like I’ve had my purpose in school and I feel like now I need to move on, do something else...I’m going out to do like my own thing in my own career which I will enjoy ten times more” (Jessica)

“I’ve got this year and next year which I’m not looking forwards to. I just kind of want to get out of school and just go and work.” (Jack)

Many students talked about a future career they had found an interest in, and this often linked to their learning within the AP. Jack for example spoke about his interest in becoming a plasterer and explained that he had been allowed to fill in holes in the walls at the AP to practice. Students also spoke about the importance of being able to study vocational subjects in the AP, which were relevant to their chosen professions, such as childcare and music.

“Childcare’s a big thing for me. I wanna do that, so I’m doing media, construction and stuff like that really and I’m doing childcare now for GCSE.” (Jessica)

Students expressed that AP staff had been supportive in working towards their future goals,

“They’re helping me get the stuff that I need to go to college. Will has helped me fill in the application form for college and we’re always working on how to apply for jobs, interviews, CVs, that kind of thing...in school we couldn’t do any of that but here they know what I want to do and they can sit and help me to figure out what I need and then, how we can do that.” (Alex).

Staff views

Staff were aware that the majority of students were reluctant to return to mainstream school and reported that often young people would stay in the AP for “at least two

years". One staff member described how, when considering the return to school, a student had said to her,

"How can I go from having just two other people in the class, back to 30! I can't do it."

Staff also described the typical process for young people returning to mainstream and emphasised the importance of transition planning to include visits with staff from the AP to support re-integration,

"some of the schools have kind of a mid-ground, for transitioning back and I think transition days can be helpful"

Staff were sceptical about students' potential to succeed upon return to mainstream settings, explaining that the pressures within mainstream schools often meant that appropriate support could not be provided, and at times young people would end up returning to the AP after a few weeks.

"We can share information as much as we like, if that school isn't prepared to take note of that child's individual needs there's nothing we can do and until that attitude within teaching as a whole is changed, I don't think children will succeed that have extra needs."

Conversely, staff tended to have a more positive outlook on young people's next steps when considering a move on to Post-16 education, such as college. Staff described taking pride in their work supporting young people to apply for college courses,

"...we take them to have a look around and get used to things, take them to interviews...We take pressure off family because we help them do their CVs, application forms, interviews...We go above and beyond what we should, above and beyond what's expected."

Summary of Discovery Theme 6: "Doing better"

Overall, young people expressed a sense of pride in their learning and progress at the AP, and many perceived that they had improved in key skills such as literacy. An appropriately differentiated curriculum, and identification of individual need, allowed students to progress at their own rate. This view was echoed by staff who valued the availability of 1:1 staffing to appropriately understand and meet individual needs.

Many students appeared to have a growing sense of themselves as being capable of learning and making progress. Young people also referred to improving resilience and developing a learner identity, often grounded in a particular learning style. Staff felt that they supported young people's resilience through the relationships they built with young people and the feedback given on their learning.

Whilst students also perceived that their behaviour had changed positively and attributed this to being given time to calm down without pressure to return to lessons or any physical restraint, they continued to see their behaviour as out of their control. They also described a feeling of injustice and favouritism in the way that behaviour was managed, whilst valuing being given an individual approach themselves. This issue was also acknowledged by staff and both groups also spoke of how young people often continued to have fixed term exclusions whilst attending the AP.

Students valued their experiences within the AP and all were keen to remain in their current setting until they were able to move into Post 16 education. The vocational options on offer, as well as additional support from staff in preparing for this next stage were helpful in enabling young people to feel ready to move on. For some however, there was a fear of returning to the busy environments from which they had been removed.

4.3 The Dream Phase

A thematic map representing the *Dream* phase of the AI cycle, generated from student interviews and phase 1 staff focus groups, is shown in Figure 4. In the *Dream* phase, staff and students were encouraged to discuss positive experiences with a focus on “envisioning what might be” (Hammond, 2013).

In the following sections, a definition of each theme is provided to give the reader an understanding of what the chosen thematic title represents. Individual sub-themes will then be described, analysed, and illustrated using direct quotations from participant interviews and focus groups. Staff and student findings will be presented separately under each theme heading.

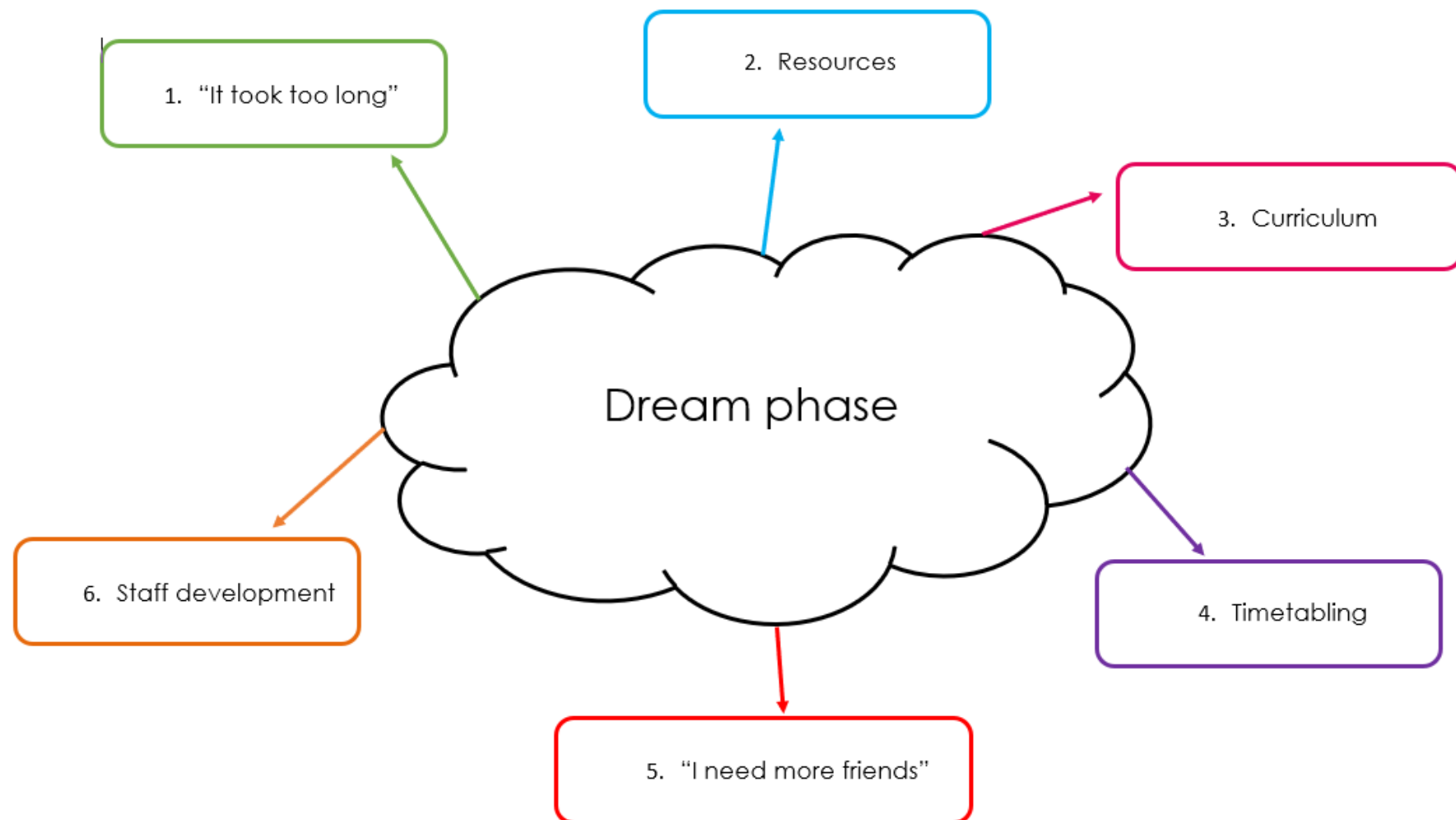


Figure 4: Thematic map of themes drawn from the Dream phase of student interviews and staff focus groups.

4.3.1 Dream Theme 1: “It took too long”

This theme explores student and staff views around young people’s experiences prior to joining AP, and thoughts around earlier access to AP settings.

Student views

Several young people spoke about how it had taken “too long” for an appropriate placement to be identified. Tyreece for example, described how he had been “kicked out” of school and then “had to stay at home for months” until a placement was found for him at the AP. Many of the young people had had similar experiences and several had spent significant periods out of any formal education.

Patrick described how he had been to several other settings prior to his arrival at the AP and indicated that he would have preferred to attend the AP sooner,

“If they’d have just put me here in the first place, it took too long to get here”
(Patrick)

Attendance at a range of other settings prior to arrival at the AP was common amongst the students and many had attended other AP settings, several mainstream schools and some had been to specialist schools (see Table 5).

Jessica felt that had her mainstream setting done more, she would have been able to stay there.

“I thought they could have put more effort in finding out, like it took them a long time to find out to get here...but yeah I thought that if they actually listened to me, my old school, then I would have most probably stayed there and I would have succeeded really well, but now I think that my best place was here at the end of the day.” (Jessica).

One young person also spoke about the issues around the funding of his placement within the AP, suggesting that he had to start at the AP on a reduced timetable due to lack of available money.

“When I first started coming here, my other school had to pay for it and obviously...like they wouldn’t pay for me to come here...They’d say like oh we can only afford like 4 hours.” (Jack)

Students expressed that they had encountered a range of negative educational experiences prior to joining the AP and that it was not until they joined the AP that they began to feel positively about their education.

Staff views

Staff shared a similar view and described how they would like to see “more early intervention” in the future. One staff member suggested that there should be a similar AP within the area catering for primary aged children,

“We need a primary provision, you know there’s children in reception now being excluded”

It was thought that if support could be given earlier on, this would prevent problems from becoming entrenched,

“if it was dealt with properly in early years, you know a lot of what we see is learnt behaviour and if you could stop it before it got to that point it would be a lot easier”

Staff also thought that they could help provide this support through “outreach in primary or secondary schools”.

4.3.2 Dream Theme 2: Resources

The quality of resources at the AP were mentioned by both staff and students as an area that could be improved.

Student views

Students mentioned furniture, especially chairs, commenting that different seating would improve their feelings of comfort and ability to focus in class,

“Get better chairs, you know a soft one, so its comfy and then you can pay attention.” (Tyreece)

The buildings also frequently came up in conversation, and students often referred to items being damaged, broken or unfit for purpose. Some of the young people commented about the location of the AP being on an industrial estate, seeing both positives and negatives of the setting,

“On a trading estate, it’s not great, but it’s fine, it means like if we can make noise you don’t have to worry about it like, like pestering anybody else.” (Jessica)

Whilst many of the students felt that the buildings and equipment were of poor quality, they described being able to make more noise than they had been able to in mainstream settings.

Students also discussed how technology was often limited and of poor quality. They expressed a desire to use more technology in their learning and felt that this was something they were missing out on compared to being in mainstream settings.

“Like my brother yeah, in his class they have like 3 iPads and like everyone gets a laptop for lessons...here we only have one laptop and it doesn’t even work half the time...we need to learn how to use the computers and that because that’s what everything is, like applying to college it’s all done online” (Katy)

Staff views

When considering how they would improve AP, staff also spoke about the quality of resources in AP, and again technology was of key importance. Staff did not feel that they had the appropriate knowledge, training or resources to meet young people’s needs in this area.

"I think we need more tech, more computers and more training on technology... I think that the kids live in a techno world and I just think it's important to teach them."

4.3.3 Dream Theme 3: Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum at the AP was also discussed as an area for improvement by both staff and students.

Student views

All young people in the study were working towards qualifications and accreditations across a range of subjects, and there was generally a shared feeling that young people experienced a wider range of opportunities than they had in mainstream settings. They also valued opportunities to complete subjects such as “childcare” and recording their own music.

However, there was a common theme that young people felt the core curriculum was often irrelevant in preparing them for future goals and understanding the world around them,

“I’d be teaching them relevant stuff...what’s happening today...Not stuff that’s completely irrelevant to pretty much any job you’ll do” (Alex)

Students consistently expressed a desire to learn skills that would prepare them for working life, independent living, and about current affairs. Whilst many acknowledged that lots of their learning in the AP was related to these areas, students expressed that they would like to shift the balance to include more of this type of learning in their day to day curriculum.

Staff views

Overall, staff felt that the curriculum gave young people good access to the skills and qualifications that they would need for adult life. Like students, staff highlighted vocational courses as a strength of the AP. They did however see potential for the inclusion of more “life skill” focused learning and expressed a similar sense of frustration as the students at the relevance of some curriculum topics.

Staff also felt that there was a need for more “specialist intervention and support”. One staff member for example said,

“I think we need more therapy and a counsellor”

Staff commented that therapeutic approaches were needed as a pre-cursor to academic progression. One staff member suggested,

“What we really need to provide is the nurture and therapy. Until they get their heads in order and know they can trust someone, know how they think, how they feel. There’s just no point in the other stuff because it won’t go in.”

4.3.4 Dream Theme 4: Timetabling

Timetabling was mentioned by both staff and young people, although only students saw this as an area that could be improved within the AP. Staff spoke of timetables in the *Discovery* phase, however their comments on the theme have been included here to make comparisons with the student perspective.

Student views

Timings of the school day in AP was an issue for some of the young people. For example, timings had an impact on home life, including the ability to meet up with friends who attended mainstream schools.

“I finish like an hour later than all my mates and then like by the time I get home I can’t be bothered to go out” (Jack)

Timings varied throughout the week, for example on some days the students would finish at 4pm and on others at 2:30pm, with differing start times to account for this. Young people generally preferred to have an earlier finish time and suggested that this gave them more time to be with friends who did not attend the AP. However, one participant described wanting to stay every day for longer hours,

“I just wanna stay on a little longer and stay ‘til 4 every day.” (Shannon)

Students followed individualised timetables, working towards qualifications such as GCSEs, life skills and functional Maths and English, as well as attending vocational learning activities. Whilst young people valued accessing a range of learning opportunities, often related to personal interests and chosen subject areas, many had difficulties in managing their daily schedules. Generally, female participants more frequently described positive experiences with timetabling, whereas male participants focused on difficulties in managing changes to their timetables.

“...just as I got used to that and knew what I was doing every day, now...I haven’t really got a clue at what things I have...they change the timetables like every day.” (Jack)

Students commented that their timetable changed frequently and that they often did not know what was going to happen that day,

“I don’t know my timetable, I just sit around and wait for teachers to collect me and tell me what lessons I’ve got.” (Tyreece)

“...it’s like no one knows what we’re meant to do and then it’s like what’s the point I might as well just go home.” (Patrick)

Staff views

Staff on the other hand, felt that the timetable flexibility was a strength of the AP.

“...we change the timetable to suit the kids, rather than have kids to suit the timetable”

Unlike students, staff saw the flexibility of timetables as a strength and suggested that this allowed for more effective planning to meet individual need. They did not appear to know that students found this difficult to keep up with at times.

Staff also spoke positively about later start times at the AP and commented that this allowed young people sufficient time to travel there.

4.3.5 Dream Theme 5: “I need more friends”

This theme explores the concept of building better relationships between young people at the AP.

Student views

As mentioned within Sub-theme 3.2 of the *Discovery* phase, young people voiced that it had been difficult to develop friendships within the AP because many of the young people came from “difficult backgrounds”.

Students also expressed trouble in understanding why some young people were treated differently by staff. In the *Dream* phase of the interview, Jack said that he would change the AP by making it,

“More accurate and fair...there are certain teachers that definitely have favouritism over students...I did a lot more than them and I actually behaved.”

Students described how friendships had been better in school than they were in AP.

Furthermore, in the *Dream* phase, when students were asked how they might improve AP, one student said,

“I need more friends...I wish they can actually get along with me, like if I break down in tears they can like hug me and talk to me about stuff, like make me feel happy...I just talk to the teachers...In my old school I had loads of friends...they were there for me...they helped me a lot.” (Shannon)

Staff views

Staff within the AP also recognised these difficulties and described how young people would often complain about “injustice”.

“It doesn’t matter how many times you say that persons individual needs are different to yours...they’re kids and they’re on a push and pull...on one hand they understand I’ve had a really bad time I should get more support, but at the same time there’s a sense everyone should be treated the same and they’re two incompatible things.”

When talking about how they might improve AP one staff member said that the dream would be,

“...if we could try and fuse the kids better like together, to accept...more like understanding”

Staff felt that if young people could understand each other's individual needs they would perhaps be understanding of the need for differential treatment. It was however also raised that, in order to fully understand each young person's needs, sensitive information would need to be shared and this would not be appropriate.

There was some discussion about how staff often did treat young people differently and that, in an ideal world, they would, at least, consistently apply consequences for every young person.

4.3.6 Dream Theme 6: Staff development

This theme explores the final theme identified from the *Dream* phase and relates to information gathered from the staff focus groups only. The theme focuses on how AP might be improved through further staff development opportunities.

Staff views

Staff considered relationships between colleagues to being vital in providing a high-quality provision. They felt that it was essential to build a strong team and that improvements could be made in this area,

“I mean when’s the last time we all come together and had a laugh and joke? It’s about doing more activities, like team building, like this, if we’re strong as a team, then we’re able to be more energised and enthusiastic about what we do.”

As shown in the above quotation, staff described appreciating the opportunity to come together as a group as part of the research. They commented that the AI process had been valuable in recognising what they did well as an organisation and in “building morale”.

Staff felt that their individual skills could be put to better use to provide a more holistic education,

“Like we’re a band of all different odds and sods and we come together and because we’ve got different backgrounds, not all from education, and we’ve all experienced different things, it gives a more cultural, a more rounder education.”

They also suggested that there could be improved support within the staff team,

“I think staff and team support...it doesn’t always happen”

Finally, staff thought that they would benefit from more training in areas such as “SEN and mental health”, so that they could provide improved support to young people.

4.3.7 Summary of Dream Themes

There was a perception from both students and staff that young people would have benefitted from earlier intervention. Young people had often experienced a string of negative educational experiences before arriving at the AP and felt that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to join sooner.

There was also a sense that an earlier understanding of individual student need, could have reduced the need for AP.

Resources within the AP were considered to be of lesser quality than those provided in mainstream settings. Technology was seen as a key area in need of improvement and young people also spoke of desiring changes in furniture to feel more comfortable.

The curriculum was a shared topic of potential improvement, with staff suggesting that there needed to be more of a focus on therapeutic approaches and nurture, and both staff and students emphasising the importance of curriculum relevance and preparation for adult life.

Students and staff had differing views on timetabling within the AP, with staff valuing the personalisation this allowed for, and students expressing difficulty in keeping up with constant changes. Timings of the school day also presented difficulty for some students and had a negative impact on peer relationships outside of school.

Peer relationships within AP were also seen as an area for improvement. Both students and staff described the difficulties of providing consistency when young people have differing needs and both groups' comments suggested that peer relationships within AP settings could be problematic.

Finally, staff proposed that further training, team-building activities and better use of individual staff skills would enable a brighter future for the AP.

4.4 The Design Phase

The final section of this chapter will focus on the *Design* phase of the AI cycle, as described in Section 3.9.1, in which staff developed an action plan based upon the themes identified within the first two stages of the AI cycle.

The provocative propositions created by the focus group are shown in Figure 5:

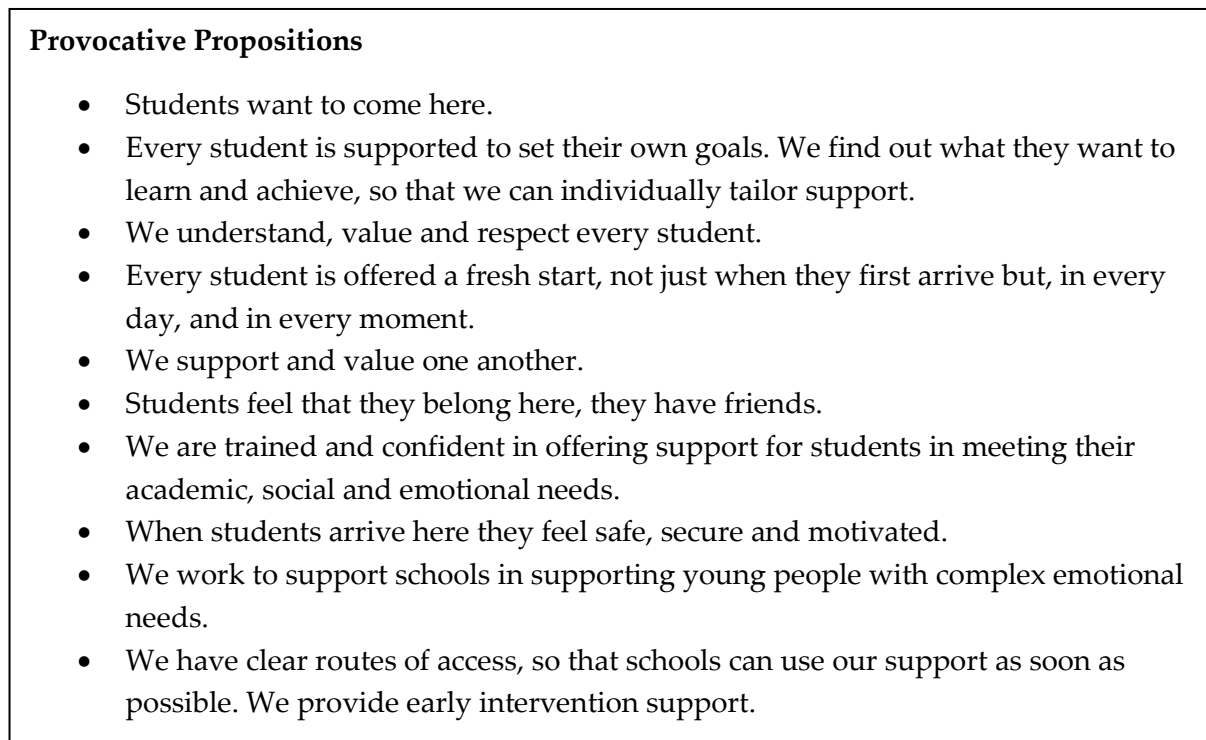


Figure 5: Provocative propositions described by the phase 2 focus group in the Design phase.

Finally, the group was then asked to use this information to consider what they might practically be able to put into action in order to continue improving their provision.

Unlike in previous sections, this section presents a list of suggestions made by staff in the final focus group and is not based on thematic analysis of data. This is shown in Figure 6.

- Collaboratively produce “ground rules” with students. The same fundamental rules for everyone.
- Involve students in setting their own goals when they first join us. What do they want to learn and achieve?
- Update the brochure on options with subjects and information from students about different courses.
- Thrive assessments for every new student so that we understand how to support them socially and emotionally.
- Training on attachment, anxiety and resilience.
- A “buddy” system to match new students with older students on visits, introduce to staff and give tour.
- Display all individual student timetables in one place so that everyone knows exactly where to look.
- Regular team-building days for staff and students to continue building strong relationships.
- Use solution circles as a staff team at least once a term in staff meetings.

Figure 6: Action points defined by staff in the phase 2 focus group in the Design phase.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will review and discuss key findings from the research in relation to the study's specific research questions.

The findings will be compared to other relevant literature within the field, to explore ways in which the study contributes to the current research base. Links with psychological theories and frameworks will also be explored to offer further interpretation.

The findings will then be summarised into key considerations for stakeholders, implications for the EP profession, and recommendations for further research.

5.2 Research Question 1: What factors do students and staff perceive as working well in supporting young people's transition into AP?

Findings described in Section 4.2.1 suggest that transitions into AP were supported by staff creating an ethos of a new beginning, in which students did not feel judged on previous actions. The relationships students developed with staff (Section 4.2.3), experiencing a nurturing environment during induction visits (Section 4.2.4), and the setting having a "more relaxed" attitude towards behaviour (Section 4.2.5), were all shown to support the transition of young people in this study.

Each of these areas will now be discussed in more detail, in relation to other literature and psychological theories.

5.2.1 Communication of expectation

It has been argued that in times of change or transition, "old habits are often no longer functional, leaving the individual vulnerable, yet open for new learning" (Smokowski, Reynolds, and Bezruczko, 2000, p. 437). This relates to participants within the current study, who saw their transition into AP settings as an opportunity for positive change and began to develop new identities in the AP because they viewed the move as a "fresh start" (Section 4.2.1).

The findings suggested that the perception of the move as a "fresh start" was enabled by staff withholding judgement. This reflects research by Levinson and Thompson (2016), who found that students attending a PRU felt they had been unable to succeed in new school placements, as part of a managed move or re-integration, because they had already been labelled by staff, and were therefore not offered support or help, as this was considered unlikely to make a difference.

Haywood (1997), proposed that labelling can be difficult to overcome, even when a person begins to display behaviours or attitudes which oppose the attached label. Thus, as noted by Lauchlan and Boyle (2007), some labels such as that of “learning difficulties” can remain with an individual throughout their lifetime. Within the current research, young people expressed a feeling that staff in the AP had not assigned any labels to them and that this had allowed them to experience joining the AP as what several participants termed, a “fresh start” (Sub-theme 3.1).

As described in Sub-theme 3.3, the perceived opportunity for change was hindered when young people had pre-existing, difficult relationships, with other young people in the AP. Students felt that they would be more likely to continue with past behaviours, such as getting into fights, and expressed concern that they would be excluded before they had even had a chance to settle there. This echoes findings from Levinson and Thompson (2016), who found that young people often became stuck in patterns of behaviour associated with certain labels and roles which had been assigned to them and were concerned about how they would be perceived by peers. However, the finding that young people felt a sense of protection when a family member attended the AP, also offers support for Michael and Frederickson (2013), who found that pre-existing relationships led to feelings of safety and reassurance when students first arrived at an AP setting. The distinguishing factor appears to be the nature of these relationships and that students needed to feel able to make a new start and move away from prior identities following their transition. Similarly, O’Riordan (2015) suggested that transition, when supported by positive relationships with staff, provides an opportunity for young people to construct new identities, which can then be confirmed through the new relationships and environment.

As described in Section 4.2.4, staff and students acknowledged that for many young people, splitting their time between two settings was often confusing, and students typically did not begin making changes in their behaviour or learning until attending the AP full time. Differing expectations of staff in mainstream and AP settings were often cited as a reason for the difficulty with split placements. Overall, staff expectations seemed to play an important role in young people’s ability to transition into AP settings and for this to be seen as an opportunity for positive change.

As was found in research by Hart (2013) and Halfon et al. (HCEC, 2018), AP staff in the current study expressed holding consistently positive expectations of, and for, young people. Since Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) first described the Pygmalion effect there has been a plethora of research into teacher expectations. Otherwise known as the self-fulfilling prophecy, the Pygmalion effect theorises that teachers having high expectations of students leads to an improvement in student

performance, and likewise that low expectations are linked with declining performance. Whilst there has been debate around the potential impact of teacher expectations (Jussim and Harber, 2005), there is an agreement within the literature that teacher expectations exist and differ between individuals, as well as groups of students (Babad, 2009; Good & Brophy, 2003; Smith, Jussim Madon, & Palumbo, 1998; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). Interestingly, in the current research, students expressed that it was important that AP staff were non-judgemental in their attitude and did not come with expectations as to how students would achieve academically (Sub-theme 1.2).

Weinstein (2002), found that teacher expectations can be interpreted through feedback, motivational strategies, curriculum coverage, and the overall classroom ethos. Staff in the current research described how they supported students when mistakes were made, using this as an opportunity for further learning, rather than reprimanding errors (Sub-theme 6.1). Furthermore, findings described in Section 4.3.3, identified that curriculum coverage was not always perceived to be relevant by young people, but that in spite of this, students described developing an appreciation of key subjects such as Maths and English since joining the AP (Sub-theme 6.1). Students also valued being able to start again in their learning of key skills in Maths and English. As identified in Section 4.2.1, students spoke of how staff assessed their needs once they arrived at the AP and felt that they were finally understood as a learner, allowing them to progress academically. Similarly, staff described how they often had little information about student's prior academic achievements and would therefore assess individual strengths and needs once they arrived at the AP. This reflects findings from Governmental papers exploring the impact of AP, such as Ofsted (2007); Ofsted (2011); and Ofsted (2016); all of which concluded that insufficient information was typically shared between schools and AP settings. As recommended in the DfE (2017) report, AP staff in the current study described how they assessed individual need to plan intervention and support. Conducting these assessments when young people were in the AP setting, rather than in their school setting, further reinforced students feeling that they were having a fresh start.

Findings from the current research identified that participants felt it important that prior information was not used to form judgements of young people and was instead used to understand individual need, plan individual intervention and offer individual support, working in collaboration with the students. Teachers in Goodman and Burton's (2010) study, which explored mainstream teachers' perspectives of inclusion, made similar claims and suggested that knowing student backgrounds and personal information allowed them to engage students and improve relationships with them. In the current study, staff spoke of the need to

understand individual student backgrounds and past triggers of behaviour so that they could plan accordingly (Section 4.2.1). As in Goodman and Burton's study, knowledge of personal information was used as a foundation to build a relationship between staff and students.

5.2.2 Relationships with staff

Research has shown that how a teacher first interacts with a student, during the initial period of relationship building, is fundamental in shaping the nature of their future relationship (Cothran et al., 2003).

In the current study, the most apparent factor identified as supporting young people's transition into AP, was the strength of the relationships students built with staff (Section 4.2.3). This offers support to research described within the literature review, which suggests that staff are a fundamental driver of young people's success within AP (DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017; Hart, 2013; Hill, 1997; Jalali and Morgan, 2018, Lloyd and O'Regan, 1999; McCluskey, Riddell and Weedon, 2015; McGregor and Mills, 2012; Michael and Frederickson, 2013; O'Riordan, 2015). It also echoes findings from research into young people's re-integration transitions back into mainstream settings, which Bagley and Hallam (2015) found needed to be nurturing and well-planned, to ensure the child felt welcomed and valued by the school.

As highlighted in Section 4.2.3, participants within the current study noted that relationships between students and staff were respectful, trustworthy, fun and genuine. Young people felt supported by staff and because staff were able to offer time and space, students described being able to open-up and talk about personal issues. Comparisons can be made between the way in which students and staff described their relationships and interactions, with Carl Rogers' core conditions for developing effective interpersonal relationships (Rogers, 1962).

5.2.2.1 Person-centred theory

Rogers (1962) proposed that it was the quality of the interaction between two people that was most significant, and that the core conditions: empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, enabled a quality helping-relationship to develop. His work has been criticised for being too vague (Gladstein, 1983; Barrett-Lennard, 1986), however, Kirschenbaum and Jourdan (2005) propose that Rogers' theories are still of significant influence and conclude that there is substantial research evidence in support of Rogers' core conditions.

Rogers (1975) described how empathy involves entering another person's world without prejudice and being sensitive from moment to moment to the changing

emotions and meanings experienced by the other person. He proposed that the non-evaluative and accepting nature of an empathetic stance allowed for the development of a climate of change and possibility. Similarly, in therapeutic relationships the presence of empathy in the early stages of relationship building has been shown to predict later success of the therapy (Barrett-Lennard, 1962). In the current study, AP staff explicitly referred to having empathy towards students, accepting them as they were in any given moment, and students described how they did not feel judged by staff (Section 4.2.3).

The findings from the current study also demonstrated that staff portrayed a genuine attitude towards young people. As described in Section 4.2.3 students felt able to relate to staff as they engaged in casual conversation. Congruence, as defined by Rogers (1957), refers to genuine and authentic communication and has been described as being embedded in a “web of intentions and attitudes”, characterised by a “non-dominant, affiliative stance” (Greenberg and Geller, 2001, p.165). AP staff in this research further demonstrated congruence in their interactions with students by communicating on first name basis. As described in Section 4.2.5, staff described their relationships with students as “authentic”.

Closely relating to this, is the concept of unconditional positive regard (Tudor and Worrall, 1994). Again, this involves a non-judgemental approach which allows for a sense of acceptance (Shefer, Carmeli and Choen-Meitar, 2018). As described by Rogers (1957), unconditional positive regard means that there are no conditions placed upon a person for them to be accepted, they are given permission to have their own thoughts, feelings and experiences, entirely without judgement. Staff in the current study demonstrated their unconditional positive regard for students in the flexibility of rules within the AP (Section 4.2.5) and in their communication of the transition as a “fresh start” (Section 4.2.1).

As described by Irving and Dickson (2006) much of the criticism around Rogers’ core conditions comes from ambiguity of his chosen terms. Whilst the terms: empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, are indeed complex and multifaceted, it seemed to me that young people in the study experienced these three conditions in their interactions with AP staff. There appeared to be an overall ethos amongst the AP staff which promoted positive staff and student interaction. Students described feeling understood and accepted. They spoke of staff being trustworthy and genuine. Not feeling judged was also a key point raised by many participants in contributing towards a successful transition into AP (Section 4.2.3). Furthermore, staff described attempting to understand what might be driving young people’s difficult behaviours and accepting students regardless of what they said or did. This was further reinforced by young people’s descriptions of staff always seeing the best in them. In this way, AP staff seemed to demonstrate the core

conditions described by Rogers, and these attitudes were felt strongly by students and valued as an essential part of their transition into AP.

Rogers core conditions are seen to be essential in bringing about change. Staff in the AP using these skills may offer an explanation as to why young people felt able to make changes to their behaviour and learning when they transitioned into AP (Section 4.2.6).

5.2.2.2 Belonging

Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that humans have a universal desire to belong, which they strive to achieve through the development and sustainment of, “at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.” (p.497). Guidance from the DfE (2016c) emphasises that, “school should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging.” (p.8) and a growing body of research suggests that feelings of belonging in the school environment relate to academic achievement, student motivation and behaviour (Allen et al., 2016; Goodenow and Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000).

Research has shown that when students see staff as an ally, they develop a sense of belonging to the school community and are more likely to engage in academic tasks (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Students in the current study expressed that staff stood up for them (Sub-theme 3.1) and explicitly referred to a feeling of belonging in the AP (Sub-theme 3.2). As was found by Jalali and Morgan (2018), Levinson and Thompson (2016), and the House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC, 2018), comparisons were made in the current study about the AP being like a “family”. Findings presented in Sub-theme 3.2, show that many students described feeling isolated in their previous setting and strongly preferred the relationships they had built with staff in the AP, over those they had had in other schools. The “family” environment of the AP fostered a sense of belonging and worthiness, that students had not necessarily experienced in other settings.

As described in Sub-themes 3.2 and 6.3, students in the current study felt rejected and isolated in mainstream settings, particularly when they had attended on-site units. Research has shown that a lack of sustained caring relationships with adults can lead to an increase in problematic behaviour (Demaray & Malecki, 2002) and this may explain why young people in the current study were often excluded from prior placements, in which they did not feel cared for by staff. Equally, Cothran, Kulinna, and Garragy (2003) found that when young people perceived staff in school to be caring, they were more likely to follow classroom rules and direction. Students in the current study expressed that they felt “wanted” by staff at the AP (Sub-theme 3.2). The relationships described in Section 4.2.3 appeared to reflect caring, nurturing and attachment-based relationships and fostered feelings of belonging for young people.

Students perceiving their relationships with staff in this way, offers a further potential explanation as to why they felt able to begin making positive changes in their behaviour and learning, as discussed in Section 4.2.6.

Similar findings were also offered by McGregor and Mills (2012), who found that relationships with staff played a key role in young people's engagement and that students valued the respect and understanding shown to them in AP settings. Staff in the current study described how high staffing ratios allowed them to get to know individual students, and as discussed by Mihalas et al (2009), this can result in staff treating young people more compassionately, and students, in turn, being more accepting of the staff supporting them.

5.2.2.3 Attachment theory

Staff in the current study described using approaches such as "Thrive" (Sub-theme 6.1), which are based within attachment theory, to build relationships with students. A brief overview and critique of attachment theory can be found in Appendix 20.

Despite a lack of empirical evidence for attachment-based strategies and critiques of the theory, it has been argued that the recommendation that carers display warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness to children is unlikely to cause harm (Cowan and Cowan, 2007). Furthermore, as there has been increasing acceptance of the importance of relationships other than that with the primary care-giver, for example that between teacher and student, over time, attachment theory has had a growing influence on education. Books such as Golding et al. (2012) "Observing children with attachment difficulties in the classroom" have been reviewed within journals such as "Educational Psychology in Practice" demonstrating the influence the theory now has within the overall field of child development (Middleton, 2013). As mentioned above, the influence of attachment theory was also present within the AP studied in this research, which used approaches based within attachment theory such as "Thrive"⁶.

Interest in attachment-based intervention stems from the belief that school staff are often in a unique position to build positive relationships with students, despite past difficulties, and to have an influence on the behavioural and life choices young people make (Mihalas et al. 2009). However, as argued by Kennedy and Kennedy (2004), there has been limited research into attachment-based school interventions, at the time of writing this report a brief literature search suggested that this continued to be true.

⁶ Thrive is an approach based upon attachment theory, child development and neuroscience to support children and young people in their social and emotional development <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

One of the approaches commonly proposed within education-based attachment resources is that of “PACE”, defined by Hughes (2004). This approach asserts that when adults convey Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE), towards the young people they support, this allows for development of emotional intelligence, resilience and self-awareness. Hughes (2004), argues that the approach also reduces shame young people feel over their behavior, teaching them to regulate their own emotions and behavioural responses. Again, there is little empirical evidence for this approach, although some research conducted by Hughes and others is available within therapeutic contexts (Hughes, Golding and Hudson, 2015).

Based upon descriptions offered by participants in the current study, regarding the nature of interactions between staff and students (Section 4.2.3), I believe that staff in the current study embodied the PACE approach in their attitudes and responses to the young people in the AP.

Staff were frequently described as being “fun” (Sub-theme 3.1). Playfulness was apparent in descriptions of staff-student relationships and participants spoke fondly of having “banter” and “a right laugh” during lessons and trips. Students told stories of the humour they shared with staff and described how this made them feel calm and happy when attending the AP (Section 4.2.3). Similar findings were offered by Fovet (2009), who found that humour created rapport between teachers and students, allowing for the growth of meaningful and genuine relationships. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) also describe the value of using humour to support students experiencing SEBD. They argued that young people often feel heightened stress and anxiety and that humour can be a valuable tool in reducing the tension experienced.

Acceptance and empathy were also frequently referred to as something that young people in the current study valued about interactions with AP staff, as discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.2.1. Staff in the current study also demonstrated curiosity about students attending AP. As described in Sub-theme 6.2, staff spoke of a desire to understand the motives and drivers of student behaviour. Golding and Hughes (2012), proposed that this is a key part of curiosity and is needed for trust to develop within the relationship.

Overall staff interactions with students seemed to embody the attitudes described in the PACE approach. In this way, the current research can be seen to add some support for the strategies recommended in attachment-based guidance, such as that of Hughes (2004), although further specific research would be needed in this area to make any stronger claims. Another study which has made tentative suggestions around the use of attachment-interactions in AP settings is that of Levinson and Thompson (2016), who found that staff in an AP described using “reciprocal conversations”, as recommended by attachment theory (Hughes, 2015).

Furthermore, AP staff in Levinson and Thompson's (2016) study felt that staff in mainstream settings were not as well equipped to provide this type of interaction and a similar view was presented by both staff and students in the current study (Sub-theme 3.1).

5.2.3 Nurturing environments

Alongside the importance of relationships in facilitating young people's transition into AP, the physical environment of the AP was also identified as a relevant factor (Sub-theme 3.2 and Section 4.3.2). Students referred to the AP feeling like "home".

When speaking about their transition into AP, students described how being taken on tours of the AP premises was helpful in reducing their nerves. Unlike the suggestion by Ofsted (2016), that students might find such environments intimidating, students acknowledged that the setting of one AP on an industrial estate was not ideal, but that they appreciated having more opportunity to make noise and have their own space (Section 4.3.2). The other AP setting, whilst on the same road as an industrial estate, was actually in a house situated with other residential properties. Again, this appeared to reinforce the homely and welcoming environment of the AP, as recommended by the DfE (2017).

The AP setting combined educational and domestic environments. Participants described that the homely arrangements of sofas in "chill-out areas", kitchen areas to prepare food, and dining areas, in which all members of the AP shared mealtimes together as a group, were seen as a space to connect with others. Students also described having a safe place to go when they needed to step away from stressful situations, which they found helpful in managing their own behaviour (Sub-theme 6.2). One of the core principles of nurture groups is to provide a safe space (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006).

Boxall (2002), who developed the concept of "nurture groups", proposed that meeting children's needs, such as their need for food, helped them to form secure and trusting attachments to staff, and that served to create a safe environment, in which students could begin to focus on their learning. Nurturing environments were apparent in the current study, through the provision of food and drink. Students spoke positively of being given special food or drink during their initial visits (Section 4.2.4). The AP encouraged young people to take turns to prepare lunchtime meals and snacks for each other. Students spoke fondly of this being a time to get to know each other, and also as an opportunity to learn important life skills.

Typically, the environment of a nurture group is characterised by a space designed to support vulnerable young children's emotional adjustment, with soft furnishings

and group activities, such as eating breakfast together (Boxall, 2002). As noted by Cubeddu and MacKay (2017), there has yet to be any systematic analysis of the impact of such an environment. Nevertheless, findings from the current study suggest that an environment in line with principles, such as those presented in nurture groups, was appreciated by young people in the AP, and were seen as a facilitator in their transition.

Whilst students and staff spoke positively about the inclusion of safe spaces and community areas within the AP, as found by Ofsted (2007; 2011; 2016), the resources and equipment were described as being of generally lesser quality than that which might be found in a mainstream setting (Section 4.3.2). Technology was raised as a specific area that required improvement and students expressed feeling undervalued because they were not able to access good quality resources. Some students also suggested that the AP would be better if it had comfortable chairs in the classrooms, as well as in communal areas, as they felt that this would support them in paying attention. Again, this appears to closely relate to the environments of soft furnishings advocated for use in nurture group settings.

Nurture group principles also suggest that children need the environment to be structured and predictable (Boxall, 2002). As described in Section 4.3.4, timetabling was one aspect that some students found difficult to manage in the current study. Staff felt that they could make changes to assist with these issues and suggested that they would develop a group timetable display, so that all students would know where to look. They also decided to talk through significant timetable changes with students so that they were more aware in advance of what would be happening. The suggestion from students that they needed more structure and predictability in their timetables suggests that nurture group principles could have some applicability to AP settings.

As noted by Vincent (2017) the majority of research into the impact of nurture groups, focusses on children in Key Stage 1. There is, however, growing evidence from secondary settings, indicating the potential for this intervention with older children (Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes, 2008; Colley, 2009). Findings from the current study suggest that further research into the impact of nurture group principles within an AP setting would be helpful.

5.2.4 Flexible Rules

The final factor perceived to support transition into AP in the current research relates to the flexible rules described in Section 4.2.5. Similarly, relaxed rules have been shown to support young people in the transition between primary and secondary school (Evangelou, 2008).

McGregor and Mills (2012) argued that,

“Rules that apply to uniforms, self-presentation, social interactions and assumptions of unquestioning obedience to adult power, position certain students for on-going systemic conflict. The young people who live in unstable and/or unsupportive/neglectful environments will find it difficult to comply with many of the cultural expectations of mainstream, middle-class schools.” (McGregor and Mills, 2012, p.846)

They also suggested that acknowledging the life circumstances of individual students, through understanding of lateness or absence, recognising that young people are addicted to substances such as nicotine, and allowing young people to refer to staff by their first names, encouraged students to feel like equal partners with school staff, and made school a more attractive prospect for young people.

Similar suggestions have been made by Halfon et al (HCEC, 2018), who found that an increase in zero-tolerance behaviour policies appeared to be increasing the rate of exclusions and number of students being sent to AP.

As described in Section 4.2.5, AP students wore their own clothes, smoked during break times, referred to staff on a first-name basis and were not reprimanded for swearing. Many of the young people described their difficulties in following rules and expectations in mainstream settings and appreciated that the rules were more relaxed within the AP. Similar findings were presented by Levinson and Thompson (2016), who found that young people attending a PRU perceived staff in their previous mainstream school to have been over-reactive. Students reported that, had staff allowed them time and space to calm down, and been more flexible in their approach, certain incidents would have been avoided.

Similarly, participants in the current study described how leniency around smoking and swearing, served to improve their behaviour and engagement. Whilst staff did not condone young people smoking, they described how allowing students the opportunity to smoke, reduced the need for confrontation and misbehaviour. Staff also felt that this built a trusting relationship in which they could then teach young people about the dangers of smoking and support them to quit over time. This also made students feel respected and as though they were being treated maturely, which echoes findings from Ofsted (2011), who found that students attending AP valued being treated as an adult.

Research would suggest that the approach taken by staff in the AP could serve to reduce the likelihood of young people continuing to smoke, although this was not addressed within the current research. Studies have shown that restricting liberties, for example enforcing school smoking bans, can lead to an increase in smoking and

reduce the effectiveness of health promotion messages (Cole, Quian and Leatherdale, 2017; Hall et al. 2016). Conversely, Motivational Interviewing (MI) has been shown to decrease smoking (Hettema and Hendricks, 2010). Staff in the current study seemed to adhere more so towards principles of MI, in that they did not try to convince students that they should stop smoking, instead encouraging students to develop autonomy and self-efficacy (Rollnick and Miller, 1995). Again, this reflected the person-centred, therapeutic approach, that the staff adopted within the AP, and the development of empathetic and trusting relationships, which they had built with young people.

Goodman and Burton (2010) found that it was important for teachers to demonstrate respect and negotiation to reduce unwanted behaviour. Furthermore, teachers in their study described how they often had to decide which behaviours to deal with and when, so as to minimise disruption to overall learning. In the current study, staff at the AP shared a similar view. They described how having more relaxed approaches towards rule breaking reduced the amount of education missed by students at the AP. As shown in Sub-theme 6.2 students were described as making improvements in their behaviour during their time at the AP, however, many continued to be issued with fixed-term exclusions for rule-breaking behaviour.

5.2.5 Summary - What factors do students and staff perceive as working well in supporting young people's transition into AP?

Findings from the current study have identified the importance of transition into AP being perceived by students as an opportunity for change. This has been shown to be facilitated by staff communicating their expectations of students as non-judgemental and not being biased by any prior knowledge, so that students feel they are being given a “fresh start”.

Overall the findings from this research reflect the view of O’Riordan (2015), who argued that positive relationships with staff facilitated successful transitions for young people. In an attempt to understand how these relationships developed, tentative comparisons have been made between the descriptions of staff interaction styles presented within Chapter 4, with theories relating to helping-relationships (Rogers, 1975), school-belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), and approaches based within Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969).

Furthermore, it has been shown that the safe and nurturing physical environment present in AP, alongside a flexible approach to rules, encouraged trusting

relationships between staff and students to develop, further enhancing the transition experience.

5.3 Research Question 2: What can we learn from young people and staff's experiences to adapt future transition planning within an AP?

This section will discuss findings relating to what we can learn from young people's transition experiences into AP to adapt and improve future transition planning. The following areas have been identified as being particularly relevant to answering the research question:

- **Disrupted education**
- **Decision making**
- **Personalised provision vs curriculum expectations**
- **Friendships**

These will be explored in more detail below in relation to other relevant literature.

5.3.1 Disrupted education

As advocated by the Children and Families Act (2014), it was acknowledged by staff and students that earlier intervention would have been helpful for lots of young people in the AP (Section 4.3.1).

Students suggested that they would have liked for their placement within the AP to have started sooner, and several said that they had spent significant periods at home, as they waited for a provision to be identified. This supports the findings from Pirrie et al (2011), who found that the majority of young people attending AP had spent significant periods out of education and some attended up to 6 educational placements, until an appropriate setting had been found. As found in Pirrie's study, the students in the current research had often experienced disrupted educational pathways, as shown in the participant profiles in Table 5.

The House of Commons Education Committee (HCEC, 2018, p.17) found that, "for many pupils their journey to the right provision takes time". Many of the young people they spoke to had experienced several failed placements, had spent time in "inclusion" or "isolation", or had developed such anxiety around school that they no longer attended. Echoing the views of students within the current research, the

committee proposed that this was in part because schools had left students to struggle for too long and was also partially caused by timescales related to the permanent exclusion process.

As described in Sub-theme 1.2, placement within the AP was described by some as a last resort and something that only occurred once everything else had failed. This suggests that the recommendation from the DCSF (2008), that AP should be used as an early intervention, is still not in place for many young people, over ten years since the recommendations were made. The findings also confirmed the view of Cole and Pritchard (2007), who suggested that young people attending AP often experience a “revolving door” effect, moving from placement to placement, with several unsuccessful moves.

As found in research by Jalali and Morgan (2018), students in the current study did not want to re-integrate into mainstream settings and instead hoped to stay in the AP until it was time to move on to Post 16 education (Sub-theme 6.3). For the majority this was the plan, and as suggested by Kinder et al. (2000), this was in part because the young people were studying for their GCSEs, and it was believed that changing settings part way through would be too disruptive.

The current research therefore suggests that identification of AP placements needs to be prompt. Staff within AP need to be aware that students transitioning in to the setting are likely to have experienced several placements prior to arriving, and as shown in Sub-theme 1.2, this can cause students to feel under pressure as they perceive the move as a last chance.

5.3.2 Decision making

The DfE (2017), recommended that young people should have direct input through the sharing of their individual aspirations and needs, in order for appropriate provision to be identified. They proposed that AP settings should engage young people in thinking about their hopes for the future and argued that choice and autonomy would be important in improving young people’s engagement, independence and development of positive social relationships.

Whilst some students in the current study described how they had been asked if they would like a placement at the AP following an initial visit (Section 4.2.2), it is important to note that there had evidently been some decision making without young people’s involvement beforehand, to allow the initial visit or placement to be organised. Young people described these decision processes as happening without their involvement, and even staff at the AP appeared to have little knowledge of how this process worked. Decisions appeared to be made in meetings outside of the

AP and by professionals from either the student's previous school or Local Authority. It was unclear from young people's accounts whether other options would have been made available should they have not wanted to attend the AP. As described in Sub-theme 1.2, many of the students did not feel this was the case, as they saw their placement within the AP as their last chance.

This echoes findings from Pirrie et al. (2011), who discovered that young people and placement providers had little agency in decision making around placements within AP, and that often the only way a student or their parent could have control over the decision was to refuse the offer of a place. They found that it was often difficult for suitable placements to be identified that met individual need and that frequently, students had to wait until they reached a specific age range to access appropriate provision. Similar findings were offered by Halfon et al. (HCEC, 2018) who found that none of the young people they spoke to felt that they had been offered a choice about where they would attend. Rather, decisions about AP were affected by availability of provision, financial considerations, and the number of spaces available. In reality, whilst Government strategy, such as that proposed in the DCSF (2008) "Back on track" review, suggests a person-centred approach in the identification of placements, this is not always feasible in practice because of the availability of provision. A potential further reason for difficulties in the identification of appropriate AP relates to the finding from the House of Commons Education Committee (2018), that as the Department of Education no longer keeps a central register of AP providers, many LAs and schools are unaware of the range of provision available in their area.

Nevertheless, findings from the current study suggest that there has been some development in transitional practices for those moving in to AP, as the majority of students were able to visit the AP prior to starting their placement (Section 4.2.4). Ofsted (2011) found that this practice was rare and that students were unlikely to have been involved in any meetings with staff prior to the commencement of their placement.

Whilst young people did not have a strong voice in the decision making around which setting they would attend, a clear strength of the AP in the current study, was that young people felt valued and listened to once they had started their placements. Research has shown that behaviour improves when students are enabled to make choices (Shrogren, Fagella-Luby, Bae and Wehmeyer, 2004). Staff from the AP within the current study used their knowledge of individual pupils to develop personalised

curriculums and as acknowledged by Leadbeater (2005), this approach encourages young people to become engaged in decision making and increases motivation.

When considering how they might improve practice within the AP, staff said that they would like for every student to be supported in setting their own goals at the start of their placement (Section 4.4). Staff suggested that they would aim to find out what each student wanted to learn and achieve, so that they could individually tailor support. This often happened informally between young people and their key worker, however, it was felt that the process needed to be given more prominence and structure to ensure consistency for every student. Staff felt that it would be appropriate to do this during the initial induction visits as students were making their transition into the AP. However, it could be argued that the process should be ongoing and take place over time, as findings from the current study showed that students gradually built relationships with the staff around them and developed a better understanding of their own goals and interests as they spent more time in the AP. Support for young people participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their own educational experiences is offered by Michael and Frederickson (2013), who demonstrated that this improves engagement and outcomes for those in AP. Support for this strategy is also offered by Solomon and Rogers (2001) who found that a small stepped approach of proximal goal setting was motivating for young people disaffected with education.

Staff at the AP thought that it would also be helpful for the AP prospectus to be updated and shared with schools, so that potential students would be able to look at the options available before coming for an initial visit (Section 4.4). As noted by the House of Commons Education Committee (2018), because AP settings do not currently have to register with the LA or Government, it is challenging for young people, their parents, and even schools and LAs, to make informed decisions about AP placements. Until this is a requirement of APs, the strategy recommended by staff in this study could be an appropriate way of communicating what is available to relevant parties. It could, however, be argued that a prospectus would be inappropriate as AP is not an option or choice in the same way as a school might be.

5.3.3 Personalised provision vs curriculum expectations

Provision appropriately matched to individual social, academic and personal needs of young people is emphasised throughout Government policy and within research literature (Bryson 2010; DfE, 2018; Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivet 2011; Pirrie et al.

2011). It has been argued that for the curriculum to be fully personalised and relevant to young people, settings need effective assessment of individual need (Gutherson et al. 2011). As found by Ofsted (2007; 2011; 2016), staff in the current study described receiving inconsistent information on young people from their previous settings. They described how it was often helpful to meet with staff from the previous school to share information face to face, as paperwork was rarely received in sufficient time and was not seen to be helpful in planning for individual need (Section 4.2.1). Furthermore, when students had spent a period of time out of education, whilst an appropriate placement was searched for, information shared with the AP was often out of date.

The AP involved in this research had developed its own assessment procedures for new starters. As highlighted by the DfE (2017) report, this allowed for young people attending the AP to perceive the move as a fresh start. Initial assessments typically focused on academic skills and were seen to give a new understanding of individual student need, particularly in literacy and numeracy skills. Students commented that they felt their needs were well understood in the AP and that staff tailored their teaching approach to meet individual need (Section 4.2.6). In the *Design* phase of the research, staff suggested that they would like to further extend their work in this area to include a more thorough assessment of other areas of need, such as social and emotional development, through tools such as the “Thrive approach” and Boxall Profile.

As stated by the DfE (2017), there has been conflicting opinion regarding the AP curriculum with some arguing that there should be an academic or vocational focus, and others recommending a focus on the development of learning behaviours. Staff teaching in AP settings have suggested that whilst academic achievement is the end goal, often students need initial support in developing motivation, improving behaviour and concentration (Solomon and Rogers, 2001). Findings from the current study show that young people valued the additional vocational options made available to them in AP and all were working towards accreditations and GCSEs in core subjects, as recommended within Governmental policy and literature (Ofsted 2007; DfE 2013). However, both staff and students thought that not all of the curriculum taught was of relevance to the students in terms of preparing them for adult life and independence (Section 4.3.3). Staff also expressed that they felt students needed more therapeutic support to manage their complex SEMH needs.

It has been found that when students find learning unstimulating and irrelevant, this can lead to disaffection (O’Keefe, 1994). Disaffection and truancy have also been

linked to students finding learning too stressful or challenging (Kinder et al., 1996). Some students within the current study explained that they continued to have difficulty in attending specific lessons such as Maths and would often opt out of these. This could potentially have been because they continued to find the learning too challenging or because they could not see the purpose of their learning in this area (Solomon and Rogers, 2000). Levinson and Thompson (2016) argue that AP settings must be allowed to differ from mainstream settings if they are to address the needs of young people holistically. They warn that if this is not the case young people will begin to see AP settings as,

“...just another school, and inevitably the same pattern of interactions that has led to exclusion from previous schools will be enacted.” (Levinson and Thompson, 2016, p39)

There is an increasing pressure on APs to achieve the same academic standards as mainstream settings and they are often criticised for the low achievement of young people, despite students arriving with lower than expected skills in key subjects (Taylor, 2012). Students and staff in the current study described the increasing pressure for students to achieve a high standard in their GCSEs and there was a sense that this was detrimental to student and staff wellbeing. As argued by Levinson and Thompson (2016), staff felt that students needed more therapeutic support to build their self-esteem and overcome deeply ingrained feelings of being unappreciated and rejected (Section 4.3.3).

The House of Commons Education Committee has proposed that accountability measures such as Progress 8⁷ can in some cases incentivise exclusion and for many young people, limit their access to a broad and balanced curriculum because of the sole focus on English and Maths. This means that young people who are perhaps more skilled in practical and creative areas are not able to give sufficient time to build on these strengths. As argued by Halfon et al. (HCEC, 2018) an unintended consequence of the Government focus on school standards has been a detrimental impact on school environments, particularly for disadvantaged young people.

5.3.4 Friendships

⁷ Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 as a measure of progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school until the end of secondary school. More information can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561021/Progress_8_and_Attainment_8_how_measures_are_calculated.pdf

The final area identified as a difficulty for young people in their transition into AP was a lack of friendships within the AP peer group. Friendships are considered essential in the development of social and emotional skills (Rubin, Bukowski and Parker, 2006) and to enable children to feel more positively about themselves and their social environments (Bagwell, Newcomb and Bulkowski, 1998; Brendgen, Vitao and Bukowski, 2000). Friendships have also been linked to children's resilience (Dearden, 2004; Newman, 2004) and have been shown to reduce the impact of stress and adversity (Daniel and Wassell, 2002).

As described in Sub-theme 3.3, young people faced a barrier to their transition if they had negative pre-existing relationships with peers in the AP, as this prevented them from moving away from prior identities. Findings also suggested that students had difficulties in developing new meaningful peer relationships within the AP. Research into the transition from primary to secondary school has shown that anxiety about making friends is a key issue for adolescents in times of transition (Ashton, 2008; Evangelou, 2008). When talking about their initial visits to the AP there was a noteworthy lack of discussion about interactions with peers during this time and students instead focused on their developing relationships with staff.

Student descriptions of peer relationships within the AP seemed distant and it was evident that they rarely spent time with one another outside of the AP (Section 4.3.5). Students spoke of their mainstream friendships more positively than they did of peer relationships in the AP. As was found by Levinson and Thompson (2016), students described how they had few friendships within the AP setting and that they often missed relationships with peers from mainstream settings. Students also described how it was difficult to sustain mainstream relationships because of the timings of the school day at the AP differing to those in mainstream settings. The difficulties experienced by young people in forming meaningful friendships in the AP were in part due to geographical issues and transportation, which could be seen as an argument in favour of local community schools.

Overall, difficulties in developing friendships within the current study appeared to mainly be associated with three key areas; students coming from "difficult backgrounds", students not showing care and affection to one another, and a feeling of staff favouritism and injustice in responses to peers.

Hart (2013) suggests that, in part, the difficulties in developing relationships between peers in AP settings is because those attending such settings often have under-developed social skills and frequently get into conflict with one another. Students and staff in the current study also felt that conflict arose because of a feeling of injustice caused by differential treatment of student behaviour. Staff felt that this could be improved by having a more consistent approach and suggested

that they would involve students in preparing a set of ground rules with clear consequences for every young person (Section 4.4).

They also felt that it would be helpful to introduce a “buddy-system”, linking students together to support transition into the AP, for example asking another student to give a tour of the building, or helping to prepare lunch together. Children have recommended the support of buddy-systems to aid transition from primary to secondary school (Humphrey and Ainscow, 2006) and peer relationships with older students have been shown to support transition at this time (Coffey, 2013; Ashton, 2008). The use of such approaches to support transition into alternative settings does not appear to have been explored within the current literature and so this would be an interesting area for further investigation.

Overall, it appears that the development of peer friendships within AP settings is a generally under-researched area and based upon findings from the current study, an area in which young people would like to see change and improvement.

5.4 Key considerations

As the current research is a small-scale exploratory study, findings should not be over-generalised to other contexts or groups. The research has however contributed towards change within the AP in which the study was conducted. The findings from this research suggest that:

- When transitioning into AP settings, it is helpful if young people see the move as a fresh start. The ethos of the AP can support young people in perceiving transition as an opportunity for change if it presents the move as a new start in which young people are not judged on their previous actions. The way that staff communicate expectations of young people is important.
- Students in this study found split placements between mainstream and AP settings challenging because of the differing expectations of each setting. This can present as a barrier in young people being able to move away from prior identities.
- The same can be true when young people move into a setting in which they have pre-existing negative relationships with other young people.
- Staff in this study appeared to use therapeutic and attachment-based interpersonal skills to quickly build relationships and a sense of belonging for new students. This encouraged young people to feel safe and secure, whilst providing the opportunity for students to begin making changes in their behaviour and learning.
- Students in the current study valued a nurturing and structured environment in supporting their transition. They found homely physical environments comforting, needed access to safe spaces to retreat to in times of challenge, and perceived the provision of special food and drink as important in the development of relationships and a feeling of togetherness.

- The flexible rules present within the AP setting in which this research was conducted allowed young people to develop attachments to staff and to feel more in control and valued.
- Students in the current research did not consistently play a role in decision making around attending AP and there is a need for further research into how to improve this.
- The pressure placed on APs to achieve the same academic standards as mainstream schools is at risk of denying their purpose and potential in providing an appropriate alternative education for young people. Exam pressure was seen to have a negative impact on student and staff wellbeing within this research.
- Further research exploring how friendships can be supported and developed for young people attending AP could be helpful.

5.5 Implications for Educational Psychologists

The current research presents a range of potential implications for EPs. Firstly, the study suggests that use of AI to support any setting in developing their organisation has potential within EP practice. Staff participants commented that they had really valued spending time talking about the strengths of their setting and that it had inspired them to try new things, whilst reinforcing that they were doing a good job in lots of areas. In this way, I have found that the approach is compatible with solution-focused frameworks familiar to many EPs. At a systemic level, EPs would be able to use this approach to bring about change in a range of educational settings.

The principles of AI also have relevance for everyday EP practice such as consultation, as shown by Harris (2015). Experience of using AI throughout this dissertation has influenced my own practice, for example through the crafting of appreciative questions, I have found an increased focus on strengths-based conversations valuable in changing narratives about young people in a range of situations.

Findings from this research emphasise the importance of early intervention and suggest that it could be helpful for EPs to have greater involvement with those at risk of permanent exclusion at an earlier stage, before schools feel the need to send a child into AP. This might for example include a consultation for any young people who receive a fixed-term exclusion. EPs are well suited to assist mainstream schools in understanding and managing the needs of young people academically, socially and in terms of their mental health and well-being. Through consultation at an early stage, EPs would be able to support mainstream staff in understanding young people's behaviour, and in identifying appropriate interventions which could potentially reduce the later need for AP for many young people. Preventative work,

including training schools about identification of need, and relevant issues such as mental health and wellbeing, as many EPs will already do, would also be helpful. With many EP services under pressure to fulfil statutory duties, findings from this research suggest that it is important that EPs continue to have the opportunity to offer this kind of work and use these skills.

Of course, as much as we might like to be involved at an early stage, this is not always possible for a range of reasons. When a young person is sent to AP with little or no warning, it is vital that EPs can be flexible in their support of settings in order to offer timely assistance with the transition process, including assessment of individual need, ensuring the student voice is heard, and planning appropriate intervention and monitoring. Many EPs also have valuable skills to offer AP settings in terms of their knowledge of the identification of SEND and evidence-based interventions, through training and consultation. There is perhaps scope for the development of a specialist role within EP services to meet this need.

Furthermore, this research has shown that young people value quickly building quality relationships with staff when transitioning into AP and that the environment and ethos of the AP are significant. EPs often have a range of skills which can be used to inform the development of nurturing environments which embody a feeling of safety and security. This could have relevance for EP work both in AP settings and in mainstream schools.

A final consideration would be the EPs role in supporting AP settings to develop peer relationships and friendships. Whilst this is perhaps more commonplace within school settings, EPs could seek to extend this work in settings such as AP. This could for example focus on advice around the development of social skills, or alternatively could involve the implementation of interventions such as the "Circle of Friends" approach (Frederickson, 2002).

5.6 Future research

Findings from this research suggest a range of possible future research directions. As one of the first known studies to look at the experiences of young people transitioning into AP, there is a need for further research in this area, with other samples and methodologies, to begin building up an evidence base. Case study or ethnographic approaches for example, following young people's transition experiences as they happen, would offer further insight and information in this currently under-researched area.

Further research will also be required to understand the decision-making processes which determine how an AP placement is identified, and how students might actively participate in this process. This would allow issues around identification of placements noted within this study to be explored.

Findings from the current study also suggest that further research is needed around the development of friendships within AP settings and how these can be facilitated.

Finally, staff in this research seemed to use specific interaction skills with students which allowed for essential relationships to be built quickly during young people's transition into AP settings. Additional research into the areas highlighted within this chapter, such as staff use of attachment principles (Hughes, 2014) and therapeutic approaches (Rogers, 1962) would be of interest both in mainstream and AP settings. Similarly, research exploring the implementation of nurture group principles within AP, would offer further insight to the findings from the current study, particularly around the physical environment of AP settings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter offers an examination of how well the current study achieved the aims and answered the defined research questions. Strengths and limitations of the study will be explored in relation to quality criteria for qualitative research as defined by Tracy (2010). A reflective account of the research process is provided in the appendices. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the overall research.

6.2 Research evaluation

Tracy (2010) proposed eight quality criteria for the critical evaluation of qualitative research. Each of these will be explored below to evaluate the current research.

Worthy topic

Tracy (2010) proposes that for research to be worthy it must be relevant, timely, significant and interesting. The current research meets these criteria for several reasons. Firstly, the research was inspired by my work as a trainee EP in which I came across many young people who were being referred to placements within AP. As shown in the literature review, the topic of exploring the voice of young people in AP is also an under-researched area and there is specifically very little knowledge as to how these young people experience transition into AP. What is known however is that young people with SEMH needs, such as those commonly found in AP, often find times of transition difficult to manage which offers further support for the relevance of this research. With rates of exclusion increasing (DfE, 2018), there is also a current interest in AP within governmental literature and a desire to improve such provision. Overall therefore the current research can be deemed a worthy topic.

Rich rigor

Rich rigor refers to there being sufficient data, appropriate sampling and appropriate procedures in data gathering and analysis (Tracy, 2010). 8 young people gave their views, alongside 13 members of staff. The use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups provided a vast amount of data for thematic analysis. As I transcribed the data myself I became very familiar with this and data was analysed systematically, following recommendations from Braun and Clarke (2013). As described in section 3.7.2 I spent time in the AP setting before data collection took place, getting to know students so that they felt comfortable in my presence and, hopefully, would therefore feel more able to share their views with me in the interviews.

The use of focus groups was an appropriate procedure for staff data gathering, the AI approach provided structure and allowed for staff to consider both strengths and

areas for possible improvement. Working in focus groups encouraged staff to work collaboratively and this developed a rich picture as stories were embellished and added to by several members of the group. Focus groups are considered an effective method as they allow members to co-construct meaning through conversation (Seidman, 2013). One potential limitation of the research was that staff included in focus groups were not in management positions. Whilst this was decided for ethical reasons, the study may have gathered more information on transition processes such as decision making had management staff been involved.

Participation in the study was open to all young people in the AP that agreed to take part, all those who participated did so voluntarily following an information session and time to ask me questions. It may be that students who chose not to participate were less positive about their placement or did not feel confident to share their views through a semi-structured interview, those who did not participate may have had very different perspectives than those who did. Furthermore those who did participate were not a homogenous group and all had differing life experiences, so I have attempted to ensure not to overgeneralise the findings from this study. The research aimed to explore young people's experiences of transition into AP and the selection of participants and methods used have achieved this aim.

Individual interviews were chosen for students rather than focus group or paired interviews as it was felt that students might not feel comfortable talking about potentially upsetting personal experiences in front of peers. As described in section 3.6.2, I visited the setting several times prior to conducting the interviews, so that students felt comfortable in my presence. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed a rich picture of information to be gathered whilst providing a structure that kept focus, for the most part, on the research questions (Bryman, 2016). The questions asked of students in semi-structured interviews were informally piloted through work with young people in my role as a TEP, however a formal research pilot would have perhaps honed down the questions asked to be more specifically focused on transition. Much of the data gathered from young people for example related to their current feelings about being in AP rather than their transition experiences. This was seen as a strength of the study however, as young people felt able to talk about what was important to them.

This in part may have also been because the young people were providing a retrospective account of their transition experiences and was therefore reflective. It was not however practical within the current project to follow young people's transitions as they happened because of time constraints and practical considerations. As noted by Tobbell (2003) however, transition does not necessarily have a defined beginning or end point and so providing a reflective account is perhaps less of an issue in this instance.

Sincerity

Tracy (2010) proposes that sincerity is shown through researcher reflexivity and transparency. I have endeavoured to be reflective throughout the completion of this research and an overall reflection of the research process can be found later in this chapter. Through frequent supervision I have been able to consider my own values and biases in relation to the research and I have also aimed to be transparent in my written description of the current study and its findings.

The findings from this research are of course influenced by my own views and pre-conceptions and I have attempted to be reflective about this process throughout the completion of this research. Use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis offered structure and rigour to the data analysis process. Furthermore, codes and themes were drawn from the data through a bottom-up approach, rather than searching for evidence of specific theories within the data.

Credibility

Tracy (2010) describes how one of the most important criteria for quality qualitative research is to provide a "thick description". To deliver this, I have included a wide range of direct quotations from participants, as well as information about individuals and the contexts in which they are situated. Whilst I have drawn my own conclusions from the data, there is opportunity for readers to understand the data presented from their own perspectives.

The data within the current research comes from multiple sources and this has been argued to deepen understanding of an area without assuming that the point of gathering multiple views is to move towards a singular valid truth (Tracy, 2010). The study could have been improved had I taken the thematic findings back to students for confirmation prior to sharing these with staff. Bloor (2001) argues that member reflections shed new light on data and allow for deeper analysis and understanding.

Resonance

Resonance is described by Tracy (2010) as the potential for research to meaningfully affect its audience. Direct quotations have been used throughout the presentation of findings to enable the reader to understand the perspective of participants and to have an empathy for their individual situations.

The current research is also deemed to have resonance as findings relate not only to young people in AP settings but to those who are at risk of permanent exclusion from school. It is hoped that readers will feel that the research is relevant to a range of situations and that the findings have some application to other settings.

Significant contribution

The current research appears to be the first that explores the transition experiences of young people attending AP and uses an AI methodology to develop practice in this area. Staff commented that they had found the process helpful and that in itself can be seen as a significant contribution of the research. Staff felt empowered to make changes and expressed having a renewed sense of pride in their achievements as an organisation.

The research findings have also contributed some new information about a relatively unknown area, and implications have been suggested for stakeholders and EPs. Whilst the study is small in scale and cannot draw any generalisable conclusions, it offers a starting point for future research and supports findings from similar work within the field.

Ethical

As recommended by Tracy (2010) for research to be of high quality it must adhere to ethical standards. The current research was given ethical approval by the University of Bristol and has protected the confidentiality of all participants throughout. There were also a range of situational and relational ethical considerations that arose throughout the completion of the research.

Throughout the completion of this research I have been aware of power balances between myself, participants and the reader of this work. During my time in the AP I attempted to build trusting relationships with staff and students by spending time at the AP over a period of weeks before the research was conducted, so that they would feel comfortable sharing their views and experiences with me. As described in section 3.6.2 I was careful not to take on the role of a staff member to maintain ethical distance as a researcher. Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach (2009) propose that researchers should find a balance between keeping sufficient distance to allow for professional judgement and building equal relationships with participants.

Meaningful coherence

The final marker of quality recommended by Tracy (2010) is that of meaningful coherence. This is said to be achieved when a study achieves its stated purpose through appropriate choice of approaches and through connection with relevant other literature.

The current research identified clear aims following a comprehensive literature review, which identified a gap in the current research. The qualitative approach chosen was appropriate in meeting the aim of finding out about perceptions and experiences of transition into AP. Furthermore, the use of AI allowed for a focus on what works (Reed, 2007).

The inclusion of questions in student interviews that explored the *Dream* phase of AI and *Dream* and *Design* phases in the staff focus groups, encouraged participants to share not only what they thought was working well but also ways in which they thought changes could be made. This supports findings from previous research using AI methodology (Bellinger and Elliott, 2011; Carter, 2006; Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne and Wilding, 2002). The use of AI appeared to spread a positive feeling amongst staff and they commented about feeling refreshed in their work with young people.

Whilst alternative data analysis strategies, such as IPA (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005) would have also provided a rich picture of how young people experience and make sense of transition into AP, thematic analysis complemented the overall methodology of using AI well. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model also allowed for the combination of student and staff views, providing a clearer overall picture in answer of the research questions.

Finally, the findings have been linked throughout the discussion chapter to other relevant research and have been directly linked to the research questions. Furthermore, specific recommendations have been made as to potential further research and implications for relevant professionals. The aim of the research was to explore experiences of young people's transition into AP and the methods used have achieved this aim. As a qualitative study, the current research aimed to deliver a rich picture of the topic, the findings are not intended to be statistically representative (Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant and Rahim, 2014) and as presented within the discussion chapter, should not be overgeneralised.

6.3 Personal Reflections

This section explores my personal motivations for the choice of research area, what I have learnt from conducting this research and my reflections on the processes used.

As a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) I have sadly seen a significant number of young people whose needs have not been appropriately provided for within mainstream or special school settings and who have subsequently been excluded on a permanent or fixed-term basis and sent to AP. Many of the young people I have encountered have spent significant periods out of school or have been sent to a range of providers before an appropriate AP has been identified. It was one such case that inspired the topic of this thesis.

Jordan* (I have anonymised the young person's name to protect their identity) was in Year 9 and had not attended his mainstream secondary school for 8 months, a managed move had been attempted yet unsuccessful, and Jordan had instead been

provided with online learning at home, which he had not yet logged on to. He was often in trouble with the police and spent most of his days on his X-Box at home alone. Both Jordan and his mum were upset and frustrated by their circumstances and were keen that Jordan returned to some form of formal education.

It was eventually decided that Jordan would be offered a place at a local AP which specialised in creative subjects and offered accreditation such as the Arts Award, alongside individual tutoring in Maths and English. Jordan did not have a particular interest in art or design and so the placement seemed an odd choice to me, but it appeared that there were no other options available at the time and so Jordan was expected to travel on 2 buses, 3 mornings a week to get to his new AP.

Fortunately, the move was a huge success for Jordan and he told me about how welcoming the staff had been when I caught up with him after his first few days. Over a period of months Jordan developed an interest in music production which was also offered at the AP, he was no longer needing support from the Youth Offender's Team (YOT) and was engaging with his learning across the curriculum, including logging on to the online learning provided by his secondary school.

Attending AP seemed to be a real turning point for Jordan, however I was struck by how long it had taken for this to be on offer and how little Jordan's views had been taken into account when planning how to meet his needs. This theme came up again and again in subsequent casework, unlike Jordan, not all placements within AP had been so successful and it often appeared that the choice of AP had been inappropriate in meeting the individual's needs or in helping them to progress towards their individual hopes and aspirations.

It was this that inspired me to look further into the research around AP, as discussed within the literature review presented in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Overall, conducting this research has been a highlight of my training as an EP. Whilst there have been many challenges along the way, spending time with the participants in this study was highly rewarding and I am truly grateful for their time and enthusiasm. As an EP I am familiar with quickly building rapport with others and gathering their views, but I was taken aback by the willingness and openness of both staff and students to share their views in contribution to this project.

One of the first hurdles I had to overcome was accessing student participants. Whilst staff from AP setting had been hugely enthusiastic about participation, and students themselves had indicated early on that they would like to be involved, gaining parental consent was a time-consuming process. Many of the young people had unstable home lives and contact between the AP and home was often inconsistent. Nevertheless, the young people and staff worked tirelessly to have consent forms signed, showing their enthusiasm to participate in the research. This was a frustrating process, as all those who would be involved were on-board and happy to participate but because students were under the age of 16 it was necessary to gain parental consent for ethical reasons. As a researcher, this again brought home to me the imbalance of power that young people in challenging circumstances may feel on a day-to-day basis.

Once consent had been given, data collection presented some challenges. On one occasion for example, I arrived at the AP ready to conduct several interviews and all participants had been excluded from the AP for bringing illegal substances on site. Whilst this added pressure to impending deadlines, it also made me aware that young people were continuing to experience exclusions within the AP setting.

Facilitating the staff focus groups was somewhat more daunting to me than conducting individual student interviews, as this was a less familiar process. However, I found that I actually thoroughly enjoyed this once it had started. The use of the AI approach created a strongly positive atmosphere. It was also reassuring that the majority of staff chose to participate and that they were all willing to contribute in discussion. Using AI within this research has shown me the power of using this approach to support systemic change and is something I hope to continue using in my role as an EP.

Transcription of the data, although useful in later data analysis, was a painfully lengthy process! As a novice researcher, I also found the process of thematic analysis challenging. At first my themes were too descriptive, and I was concerned that deeper analysis would move away from participant accounts or oversimplify their meanings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of data analysis was helpful, however at times it was overwhelming to consider the many possible interpretations of the data and I spent considerable effort coding and re-coding data, developing themes and re-naming these so that they were coherent. The ongoing development of themes also meant that I needed to re-structure and draft my overall findings chapter several times.

Now that I have completed the writing of this dissertation I am proud of what I have been able to achieve. The research offers new insight into an under-researched area and genuinely appeared to promote change within the AP context in which it was

conducted. Using AI resonated with other approaches I use within my practice as an EP, such as solution-focused approaches and has reinforced to me the power of building on strengths and looking for solutions in order to bring about change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Overview of Governmental papers and policy relating to AP and exclusion

Publication date	Publication title	Summary of Key Findings and Key Recommendations
Ofsted (2007)	“Pupil referral units: establishing successful practice in pupil referral units and local authorities”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful PRUs had a defined goal, focussing on academic and individual progress and preparation for next stage of life. • Interesting, relevant curriculum with accreditation. • Insufficient information from previous school. • Clear plans for progress, next steps and timescales allowed for re-integration to mainstream education. • Local Authority monitoring of progress was minimal with insufficient analysis of data to support improvement of standards. • Insufficient consideration of long-term placement for young people with statements of SEN. • Schools to provide PRUs with data on attainment, attendance and needs of students. This information should then be used to support a smooth transition. • Closer monitoring and evaluation of PRU effectiveness and student progress is needed. • Improvements should be made to accommodation. • Ensure students receive the required amount of provision particularly in English and Maths
DCSF (2008)	“Back on track project – commissioning Alternative Provision”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A four stage process for commissioning AP was identified. • The LA or school (whichever places a child in AP) remains responsible for the suitability of provision. • Placements should be carefully monitored to ensure they are meeting individual needs, providing good quality provision and value for money. • Limited performance data for young people attending AP indicates generally poor outcomes. • AP should; build on individual young people’s skills and strengths, offer a core educational entitlement, be better planned for the individual, offer support to professionals and improved accommodation and facilities, and should be used as an early intervention

		as part of an integrated approach towards meeting an individual's needs.
DfE (2010)	"The Importance of Teaching – The schools white paper"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the diversity and range of provision available. • All students in AP receive a full-time education. • Pilot schools being given the responsibility and funding to secure AP for those at risk of permanent exclusion. • Significant amount of those attending PRUs do not achieve meaningful qualifications. Academic performance of those attending AP will be included in school performance tables creating an incentive to avoid exclusion and to ensure good AP.
Ofsted (2011)	"Alternative Provision"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More boys attending AP than girls, 69% have an identified SEN, the majority are in Years 10 and 11, approximately a third have been excluded on a fixed term basis prior to attending the AP. • Quality of AP varied, some have poor quality accommodation. • Many did not monitor progress effectively making it difficult to evaluate impact as no success criteria had been formulated prior to the young person's attendance. • Not all schools or units had visited the AP prior to a student beginning a placement. Some AP settings formally interviewed students before commencement of the placement and some engaged in less formal meetings with students and parents, however this practice was rare. • Students attending AP were rarely visited by their school or unit. • Accreditation was offered by most AP settings. • Information given to AP was insufficient, for example not including information about SEN or the young person's literacy and numeracy levels meaning that students were at first asked to complete unsuitable tasks. • Whilst student attendance was monitored by schools and units it was rare that student behaviour was monitored in any way, despite this often being a key need of the individual. Similarly, student progress in learning and the impact on personal development was rarely monitored.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students attending AP were generally positive about the placement and valued being treated as an adult. Students recognised improvements in their attendance, motivation, and progress.
DfE (2012)	“The back on track alternative provision pilots – Final report”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people attending AP show improvements in attitudes towards education which influenced attendance and punctuality. Students achieve GCSEs and vocational accreditation, although below the levels of those attending mainstream education. Young people show improvements in self-confidence, self-esteem, behaviour, communication, interactions with others and have a more positive outlook. Not all those attending AP secure positive destinations. Some re-integrate into mainstream education or progress to further education, training or employment. Retention in subsequent destinations requires improvement. Referrals with insufficient data can cause unsuitable choice of AP. Staff are a critical driver of success in AP and they require an affinity for supporting “hard-to-reach students” and a dedication to developing relationships with young people. There is a need to improve the assessment and monitoring of impacts, outcomes and achievements of young people in AP.
Taylor (2012)	“Improving Alternative Provision”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements should be made to assessment, identification of children’s needs and monitoring of progress to ensure intervention takes place as early as possible and that clear and realistic plans are made for children’s time in AP. All young people attending AP should have challenging and appropriate teaching in English and Maths. Schools should be responsible for commissioning AP instead of Local Authorities. When sending a young person to AP schools should send detailed information to support the development of targets and a clear plan of intervention which should be regularly reviewed and monitored. Those attending AP should be able to stay for as long as needed on the condition that the placement remains

		appropriate in meeting their needs.
DfE (2013)	“Alternative provision – Statutory guidance for local authorities”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAs have a responsibility to identify “suitable education” for students who have been permanently excluded and school governing bodies are “responsible for arranging full-time education from the sixth day of a fixed term exclusion”. • Schools can use off-site provision to improve behaviour. Good AP should meet students’ individual needs and allow them to achieve equivalent accreditation and qualifications to mainstream peers. • AP should work towards the identification of personal, social and academic needs and subsequently support young people to progress in these areas. • Next steps following a placement within AP, such as re-integration to mainstream, or moving on to further education, training or employment, should be clearly defined targets for young people attending AP. • All students should receive full-time provision unless a medical condition makes this inappropriate.
DfE (2014)	“School exclusion trial evaluation”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some LAs trialled being given funds from the LA to commission AP and take on greater responsibility of this. • Schools had diverse understandings of what “increased responsibility” for permanently excluded children meant. • School staff in trial LAs took more responsibility for making AP arrangements, there was increased use of panels for decision making, enhanced quality assurance and increased collaboration between schools. • PRUs reduced with many closures, whilst there was an increase in managed moves. • Fewer young people were permanently excluded and the number of “at-risk” reduced. • Data was used to identify patterns of behaviour so that appropriate AP could be identified for individual pupils.
DfE/DfH (2015)	“SEND code of practice: 0-25 years”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education must be full-time unless the LA recommends that a young person’s physical or mental health needs prevent this from being in their best interests. • AP education should be “on par” with that provided by mainstream schools.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a clear plan for progression which should be kept under regular review. • AP includes online learning provision. This should, where possible, go together with “face-to-face contact with peers” and should take account of an individual’s ability to work independently and their home circumstances.
DfE (2016)	“Educational Excellence Everywhere”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform the AP system so that mainstream schools retain responsibility for those attending AP and can commission high quality provision. • By every objective measure those attending AP have noticeably worse outcomes than their peers. Few attain sufficient qualifications and they are more likely to become NEET. • Many students enter AP without an agreed plan for measuring impact and whose needs could often be better addressed within a mainstream environment. • The most challenging young people are often placed with the weakest AP settings. • There should be a “minimum curriculum standard” and explicit requirement that all young people “in AP have access to a broad and balanced curriculum”. • “New research should explore how young people arrive in AP” to “develop and disseminate evidence on what works”.
Ofsted (2016)	“Alternative provision: the findings from Ofsted’s three-year survey of schools’ use of off-site alternative provision”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools were more aware of AP quality and where this was deemed insufficient, schools began to develop in-house alternatives. • Not all AP settings were adequately checked by schools to ensure safety standards were met. • Whilst accommodation had generally improved and was of a high standard in many AP settings, some classrooms remained insufficient and had outdated equipment, “their locations at the backs of industrial estates could form an intimidating introduction for some pupils, parents and carers.” (p.32). • Information about academic capabilities of students was still insufficient in some cases although there was a general improvement from the 2011 study. • The majority of students in AP were working towards qualifications in English and Maths, however for 25% the curriculum was deemed to be too narrow and insufficient in the preparation for next steps.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of students felt positively about the AP and the impact of this on their learning, behaviour and attitude towards education.
DfE (2017)	“Alternative Provision: Effective Practice and Post 16 Transition”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited information available about those who transition from AP into Post-16 learning or employment and tools to measure the outcomes of AP need further consideration. Referrals to AP should take account of individual needs and aspirations with direct input from the individual to ensure the provision is appropriate. AP settings should assess new students as part of a fresh-start approach, considering learning needs alongside their hopes for the future and wider needs. It is essential that young people can build positive relationships with AP staff to successfully move on to further education or employment. Choice and autonomy are important in improving young people’s engagement, independence and positive social relationships. There is conflicting opinion regarding the AP curriculum with some stating that this should focus on the development of learning behaviours and others arguing for an academic or vocational focus. Not all young people in AP are taught a sufficiently challenging curriculum and not all vocational courses are appropriate for transition to Post 16 provision. The most successful provisions have a lower student-teacher ratio and the relationships between staff and students are vital. Buildings should be well-maintained and attractive so that they are inviting and consider young people’s emotional wellbeing, providing a sense of safety.
DfE (2017a)	“Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AP should be arranged as soon as possible following an exclusion and must be in place from the sixth day. The school and LA should work together to identify AP for looked after young people. AP can be used alongside mainstream or special education or to address poor behaviour.

Appendix 2 – Scoping Literature Search

The Governmental literature and statistics presented in Sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, were obtained through manual searches on the Gov.UK and Ofsted websites, using key search terms including, “alternative provision” or “exclusion”. A chronological approach was taken, to understand how the governmental literature around AP had developed over time.

When exploring academic literature relating to AP, an initial search of relevant databases including: Psych info, Psycharticles, British Education Index, Teacher Reference Centre, ERIC, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts (H.W Wilson) was conducted. Search terms relating to the research questions, *Alternative provision OR alternative education OR alternative education provision OR education other than at school* AND *transition* returned thirty sources which met the criteria of being:

- Published since 2007 (this was identified as a key date within the Governmental literature search as to when AP was beginning to be of interest in reviews such as by Ofsted and also ensured that research was relatively recent).
- Available in the English language and in full text.
- Published in a peer reviewed academic journal to ensure quality control.

Only two were deemed relevant to the overall research, neither of which focused on the transition into AP, but which offered some exploration of student and staff perception of being in AP.

It was determined that rather than a systematic literature review, a scoping review would be used to explore literature relating to the overarching research area. Scoping reviews are best suited to address exploratory research questions such as those addressed within the current research and can be used to map key concepts within an area, identifying gaps within the literature (Colquhoun et al., 2014).

Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review framework, which follows a systematic procedure for searching and summarising literature was used. This involved 5 stages: 1) Identifying the research questions, 2) Identifying relevant studies, 3) Study selection, 4) Charting the data, 5) Collating, summarising and reporting the results. Each of these stages will now be discussed in turn.

Stage 1: Identifying research questions

The scoping review aimed to answer the following questions:

- What does academic research tell us about the views and experiences of those attending AP?
- What do we already know about the views of staff working in AP as to how they support the needs of young people in these settings?
- What are the outcomes for young people attending AP?

These questions were used to guide subsequent search strategies. Key words and phrases were added to search terms as I became more familiar with the available literature. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) recommend that a scoping review should not be linear and should

instead reflect a growing understanding of the literature base. In line with this suggestion, two further questions developed as I became more familiar with the literature:

- What does research tell us about re-integration into mainstream settings following time in AP?
- What do we know about the transition experiences of young people attending AP?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

To ensure wide coverage of literature, as is required in a scoping review (Arskey and O'Malley (2005), research was searched for through the following electronic databases; including: Psych info, Psycharticles, British Education Index, Teacher Reference Centre, ERIC, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Abstracts (H.W Wilson). Reference lists were also followed through from relevant papers alongside some citation searches. Manual searches of key terms, such as "alternative provision", were applied to relevant journals such as "Educational Psychology in Practice".

Stage 3: Study selection

To ensure only relevant studies were included the following criteria were applied to search results.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published in the English Language • Peer-reviewed journal articles • Full-text availability • Includes the voice of young people who have directly experienced exclusion and/or attending AP • Includes the voice of staff who have direct experience of supporting excluded young people or those in AP • Studies with samples of Secondary age students who have been excluded or attend AP • Studies in the UK • Studies outside of the UK which include a clear description of AP within that country for this to be deemed similar to UK AP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies published in languages other than English • Non-peer reviewed journals or opinion pieces • Studies for which the full-text was not available • Studies only exploring the views of students who had only attended mainstream settings and who had not experienced exclusion • Studies exploring only view of Primary aged students • Studies conducted in countries which use AP in a different way to that in the UK or with insufficient description as to how AP is used in that country • Studies which only referred to hospital based AP settings

Stage 4: Charting the data

As shown in Appendix 3, relevant information about key studies, such as the Author(s), year of publication, methodological approach and main findings were summarised. As relevant papers were identified I used the CASP checklists for qualitative research to

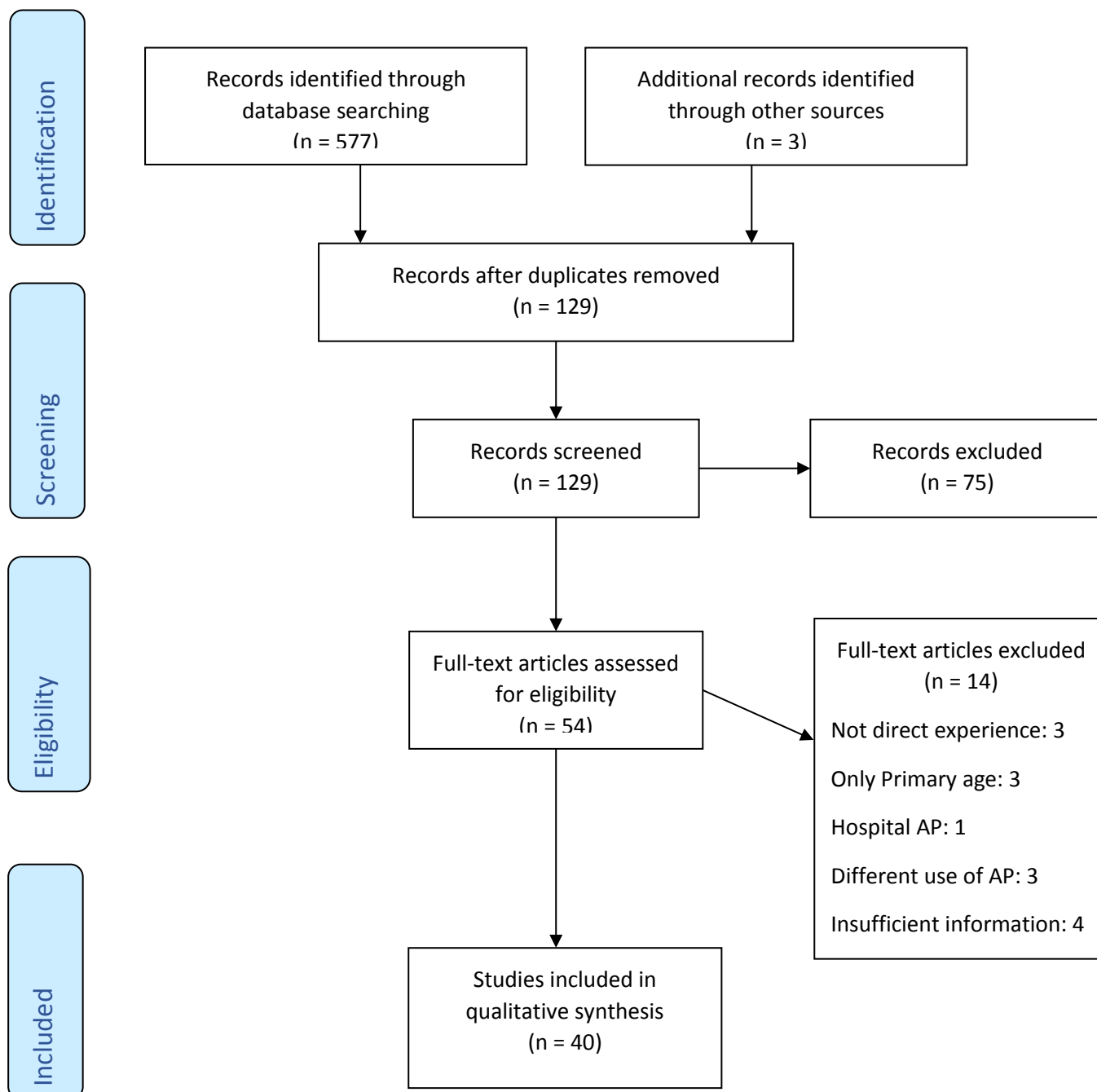
critically appraise the research (https://casp-uk.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CASP-Qualitative-Checklist-2018_fillable_form.pdf).

A critical appraisal of the identified research included and assessment of the paper's inclusion of a description of the sampling strategy, data collection procedures and the type of data-analysis used was included in my charting of the data.

Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting the results

As recommended by Levac et. Al (2010), the relevant papers have been presented within themes, as found in Section 2.5.

Presented below is a flow chart representing the literature search process, adapted from Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff and Altman's (2009) Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA).



Adapted from: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement.

Appendix 3 – Critical review of key academic literature

A sample of key papers from the literature review is included below:

Paper	Methodology	Key findings	Critical analysis
Hamilton & Morgan (2018) An exploration of the factors that lead to the successful progression of students in alternative provision.	Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews. 8 students aged 16-18 who had moved on from AP to college. 7 male, 1 female.	Supportive and personalised learning experience including; Full, accessible and diverse curriculum. Positive, holistic learning environment. Motivation. Staff understanding need. Adult environment.	Small scale, exploratory. Participant demographics do not reflect AP population. Under-representation of female view.
Alvarez-Hevia (2018) The Emotional Learning of Educators Working in Alternative Provision	Interpretivist. 14 semi-structured focus group interviews with 7 staff in a Primary PRU (2 teachers, 5 mentors). 3 months observation.	First experience of working in PRU challenging. Over time develop strategies to cope. Changing distance in relationships with students over time.	Primary PRU so different age range to that within the current study.
Malcolm, A. (2018a) Exclusions and alternative provision: piecing together the picture.	Quantitative study of exclusion statistics and AP.	Over 50% students were referred to AP by the LA for “medical or other reasons” or by their school to “improve behaviour”. For every student permanently excluded, a further 5 are sent to AP. Those who receive FSM, those who are mixed White and Black Caribbean or Black Caribbean ethnicity, those with a statement or EHCP and those in local authority care are over-represented within AP.	Statistics used are gathered from a range of sources and were not intended for use in the research. Data will not include unofficial exclusions or under-reporting of exclusions and there will be discrepancies between sources.
Malcolm, A. (2018b) Heads of alternative provision: committed to realising young	3 interviews and 20 surveys with Head Teachers or Managers of AP across one county.	Relationships between staff and students is vital to the success of AP. Staff managing AP are committed to young people	The researcher had an ongoing working relationship with several of the settings studied.

people's potential in an unregulated market.		and see potential in those attending AP.	Only looked at views of managers who may be more detached in terms of relationships with students.
Jalali & Morgan (2018) 'They won't let me back.' Comparing student perceptions across primary and secondary Pupil Referral Units	Phenomenological and qualitative study set in three Pupil referral units Semi-structured interviews with 13 students (Aged 7 – 16)	Students attribute behaviour to external factors. Attending seen as time of change academically and socially. Primary students wanted to return to mainstream and secondary did not.	Comparison between primary and secondary may reduce internal validity of conclusions made. Author notes that participants may have wanted to please the researcher.
Levinson & Thompson (2016) 'I don't need pink hair here': Should we be seeking to re-integrate youngsters without challenging mainstream school cultures?	Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews. Staff and student perspectives in AP. Students aged 11-16.	90 % successful re-integration for Key Stage 1 and 2, 75% in Year 7 and 8, below 50% in Year 9 and 10-15% in Years 10 and 11. Gradual re-integration with visits supported by staff from AP. Importance of relationship between school, home and AP. Transition into secondary school and between schools often caused difficulties. Policy overlooks the fact that some students need provision to be different than mainstream.	No information on how percentages were established. Potential bias resulting from researcher's position as one worked within the AP. Lack of clarity around how many participants were involved.
Putwain, Nicholson & Edwards (2016) Hard to reach and hard to teach: Supporting the self-regulation of learning in an	Month long field work including; 29 semi-structured classroom observations using an adaptation of a previously designed	Breaking down tasks, providing prompts, encouragement, use of frequent feedback, prompt support and scaffolding were all found to support engagement.	No critical analysis is included of the potential influence of the researcher presence over an extended period.

alternative provision secondary school.	<p>schedule</p> <p>35 semi-structured interviews with students (23 male, 12 female) aged 14-16 years.</p> <p>37 semi-structured interviews with staff.</p>		<p>The researchers used a tool which looked for specific instructional practices in their observations and interview schedules. This may lead to biased results and miss out key information not covered in the tool.</p>
O’Riordan (2015) Building productive relationships with young people with SEBD in transition: the role of identity	<p>Qualitative, longitudinal study over 15 months.</p> <p>13 student case studies (2 female, 11 male).</p> <p>Students interviewed up to 3 times, as well as parents (where possible) and other important adults.</p>	<p>Transition is a window of opportunity for change.</p> <p>Identity verification may influence students’ ability to form productive relationships with helpers and to cope with transition.</p> <p>Transition offers an opportunity to construct identities which fit the new environment.</p>	<p>Limited information given about the interviews.</p> <p>Researcher states she did not gather information about individual need specifically and so unclear how well students would have accessed lengthy interview process, 9 participants attended special school and may have had speech and language needs for example.</p>
Trotman, Tucker & Martyn (2015) Understanding problematic pupil behaviour: perceptions of pupils and behaviour coordinators on secondary school exclusion in an English city	<p>Ethnographic approach using individual semi-structured interviews and qualitative data analysis.</p> <p>49 students aged 13-14 (23 girls, 26 boys) and 8 behaviour coordinators from seven secondary schools and two APs.</p>	<p>Primary to secondary transition was seen as traumatic and to be an underlying cause of behavioural issues.</p> <p>Different but not less demanding approach offered by AP.</p> <p>Need for high quality pastoral support.</p>	<p>Schools were given responsibility to select a representative sample of students, there may be biases in their selection which will impact upon the results.</p> <p>Lack of clarity about how many</p>

			students were from the AP and how many from secondary school.
Farouk, (2014) From mainstream school to pupil referral unit: a change in teachers' self-understanding	IPA 3 teachers from 1 PRU, all interviewed twice.	None had formal SEBD training. Motivated by moral purpose and commitment to students. Mainstream too focused on administration. Desire to turn around and rescue students. Reevaluate role over time.	Small sample size which works with methodology chosen however reduces generalisability.
Pillay, Dunbar-Krige & Mostert (2013) Learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties' experiences of re-integration into mainstream education	Qualitative approach within the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. 13 students with BESD aged 11-14 from 4 schools (10 boys, 3 girls) completed a writing activity finishing incomplete sentences and a life essay on their re-integration experiences. 4 were then chosen to participate in unstructured interviews. Parent qualitative questionnaires and 7 mainstream teachers email questionnaire, as well as interviews with 3 professionals were also completed.	Promotive and risk; emotional experiences, relationship experiences and experiences based on the re-integration processes. Gradual re-integration, 3 days a week, taster days.	Sampling method is biased to select those of higher writing ability. Low response rate of parental questionnaires.
Hart (2013) What helps children in a pupil referral unit (PRU)? An exploration into the potential protective factors of a PRU as identified by children and staff	Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with 6 children, aged 9-13. 5 boys, 1 girl. Alongside semi-structured interviews with 4 members	Relationships were of key importance, students valued caring, reasonable, entertaining and humorous staff who were "understanding, trusting and supportive"	Small sample size Issues with scaling such as desirability effect or leniency error. Research-driven

	of staff.	<p>Personalised lesson planning.</p> <p>Rewards as reinforcement.</p> <p>Learning was made relevant through the teaching of life skills.</p> <p>Staff had “high expectations” and were consistent.</p> <p>The PRU environment offered a sense of safety and security.</p>	focus of the study which shaped the structure of the interviews could potentially frame data into pre-existing themes.
Michael & Frederickson (2013) Improving pupil referral unit outcomes: pupil perspectives	<p>Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>16 students aged 12-16. KS3 and KS4 (2 PRUs).</p>	<p>Importance of positive relationship with teachers, peers and family members.</p> <p>Curriculum relevance and personalisation.</p> <p>Clubs and activities.</p> <p>Consistency in behaviour management.</p> <p>Importance of the learning environment (small class sizes, calm).</p> <p>Motivation and self-discipline, improved attitudes towards education.</p>	<p>Facilitators and barriers such as family factors not included.</p> <p>Only involved those whose parents gave consent. Those with perhaps less ordered home lives therefore not included.</p>
Lawrence (2011) What makes for a successful re-integration from a pupil referral unit to mainstream education? An applied research project	Qualitative study exploring views of 11 PRU staff, 6 mainstream staff and 1 behaviour support service professional through focus groups.	<p>Importance of student wanting to return to mainstream for successful re-integration.</p> <p>Family support needed.</p> <p>Re-integration needs to be timely and into a fully inclusive setting.</p>	<p>Does not include pupil voice.</p> <p>The author has not critically examined their own role in facilitating the focus groups and the impact this had on discussion.</p>
Pirrie et al. (2011) What happens to	24 students (23 male and 1 female) aged 9-14 years	Disrupted educational pathways.	Selection of participants is

pupils permanently excluded from special schools and pupil referral units in England?	took part in interviews as well as their parents/carers and key service providers.	Reasons for exclusion; violent assault, persistent disruptive behaviour. Individual packages of support. Students, parents and service providers had no agency in decision making.	unclear. No information is given as to the structure or content of interviews and methods of data analysis are not explored.
Russell & Thomson (2011) Girls and gender in alternative education provision.	An ethnographic approach taking place over 8 months across 6 APs. Data consisted of observation field notes, 31 surveys returns and 85 semi-structured interviews with 18 programme officers, 57 students (42 male, 15 female) and 10 parent/carers.	Girls managed their minority situations differently, some adopted masculine behaviours, some tried to avoid attention and others exaggerated their heterosexuality. AP offers narrow gender stereotypical programmes of study.	Only 15 of the 57 young people interviewed were female, yet the majority of findings relate to female experience of AP.
Knipe, Reynolds & Milner (2007) Exclusion in schools in Northern Ireland: the pupils' voice	15 focus groups were held with 114 students aged 11-16.	Students felt that there should be AP for excluded young people. There was no consensus as to who should be involved in decision making about suspension or exclusion.	Student participants were chosen by school staff and may therefore be subject to bias. It was unclear how many students had direct experience of exclusion. Thematic analysis has been used but not in a systematic way such as Braun and Clarke (2006)
Kinder et al. (2000) Working out well: effective provision for excluded pupils.	Mixed-methods approach including telephone interviews with LA staff, interviews with 39 young people and 11 parents.	Students in Years 10 and 11 were less likely to be re-integrated due to concerns around their ability to catch up with missed coursework. Those who had experienced more than one	Sampling methods of young people were unclear. Little information is given about how the data was analysed.

		<p>permanent exclusion were not considered for re-integration and instead they remained in AP for the rest of their education.</p> <p>Permanently excluded young people cannot be channelled into one type of provision.</p>	<p>It is not clear from the description offered how the study could be replicated.</p>
<p>Lloyd & O'Regan (1999) Education for social exclusion? Issues to do with the effectiveness of educational provision for young women with 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties'.</p>	<p>Small scale qualitative study interviewing 20 young women in their final year of school and re-interviewing 14 a year later.</p>	<p>Most viewed their mainstream schooling experiences negatively.</p> <p>Staff in AP were seen as more reasonable, better listeners and more sympathetic.</p>	<p>Only includes the voice of females.</p> <p>There is no description of how data was analysed.</p>
<p>Hill, (1997) Pupil Referral Units: "Are they Effective in Helping Schools Work with Children who have Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties?"</p>	<p>A mixed methods approach was used including; examination of documentation, interviews with staff, 8 questionnaires sent to co-ordinators and 5 interviews (all male)</p>	<p>Students valued positive relationships with staff, being taught in small groups and having greater levels of 1:1 attention in the PRU.</p>	<p>The PRU had only recently been established (2 terms).</p> <p>The researcher may have some bias in the writing of the report as they work at the PRU.</p>

Appendix 4 – PowerPoint for information on research

An Appreciative Inquiry of transition into Alternative Provision

Sarah Martineau
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Bristol University

Why am I here?

- Trainee EP
- Interest in AP
- Student and staff views

What am I trying to find out?

1. What students and staff think works well in supporting the move into AP?
2. What can we learn from your experiences to adapt future transition planning?

How you can help

Students

- Individual interviews
- 45 minutes
- Your experiences and opinion

Staff

- 2 focus groups
- 1 hour each
- Your experiences and opinions

Student interviews

- Your experiences of moving from school to here.
- What was joining here like for you?
- Who or what helped you to settle in?
- What else could have been done to make it easier/better?

Audio recorded
Confidentiality
Timings

Staff interviews

PHASE 1 FOCUS GROUP

- Your experiences of supporting students in their transition.
- What works well?
- What would make it even better?

PHASE 2 FOCUS GROUP

- Using themes from overall data, what changes could you make?

• Audio recorded
• Confidentiality
• Timings

What now?

- Information sheets
- Expression of interest forms
- Consent
- Questions?

Appendix 5 – Research information sheet



An appreciative inquiry of transition into alternative provision

What is this research about?

This research aims to find out about young people's experiences of moving into an alternative provision through answering the following questions:

- 1) What factors do students and staff perceive to work well in supporting young people's transition into alternative provision?
- 2) What can we learn from young people's experiences to adapt future transition planning within an alternative provision?

What are the benefits of this research?

Currently, very little is known about what young people find helpful when moving into an alternative provision. This research hopes to gather views from students who have been through this experience, to find out what works and what could make this even better. The research is also exploring the views of staff in alternative provision, to find out what they can do to help. This information will be brought together to think about how we might improve transition planning for future young people joining alternative provision.

Who is doing the research?

Sarah Martineau is carrying out the research as part of a Doctoral training programme at the University of Bristol. Sarah is currently a trainee Educational Psychologist in [REDACTED] Local Authority and has experience as a teacher. She has an enhanced DBS certificate and is supervised by Dr. Dan O'Hare and Ms. Carmel Hand at the University of Bristol. Ethical approval for the research has also been granted by the University of Bristol.

What will taking part involve?

There are several stages to the research as follows:

- 1) Individual student interviews.
These will take place on site at [REDACTED], during school hours. Interviews are expected to last between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Interviews will discuss student experiences of moving in to alternative provision, focusing on what they think helped and what could have made the experience even better.
- 2) Phase 1 staff focus groups.
These will take place during staff meeting hours and are expected to last one hour. No more than 8 staff members will be allocated to a focus group. Discussion will be facilitated by Sarah (the researcher) and will cover topics such as how staff support young people's transition and how staff think transition into [REDACTED] could be improved.
- 3) Phase 2 staff focus groups.

Information from the student interviews and phase 1 staff focus groups will then be brought together into themes by the researcher. These themes will be shared with staff in phase 2 focus groups. This focus group will involve thinking about the information gathered and how this could be used to develop transition practices at [REDACTED]

How will my information be stored and protected?

All data collected will be kept anonymously and stored securely in password protected files at the University of Bristol in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Records will not include your name or the name of the alternative provision.

Best endeavours will be made to ensure that you cannot be identified from the data or information published within the final report. There is however a possibility that someone will recognise you from what you have said in the interview. As a student, if you later decide to withdraw something you said in the interview you can do so by DATE.

Limits on confidentiality.

If any information is shared which causes the researcher concern, such as a student being at risk of harm, this will be passed on to the designated safeguarding person at [REDACTED] and research supervisors at the University of Bristol. You will be informed if information is going to be passed on in this way.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

The findings from this research will be used to write a doctoral thesis and a summary will be shared with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] county council. Further papers and journal articles may later be produced for publication.

Should you have any questions about the research please contact me on sm15170@bristol.ac.uk. [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] will also be able to answer any questions you may have.

If you would like to participate in the research, please complete the expression of interest form attached.

Appendix 6 – Expression of interest form



Expression of interest form

Please tick an option below.

☐ I **am interested** in taking part in this project

☐ I do not want to take part in this project

Name: _____ (you only need to write your name if you **are interested**)

Appendix 7 – Information letter for parents



Sarah Martineau
Norah Fry Research Centre
8 Priory Road
Bristol, BS8 1TX
sm15170@bristol.ac.uk
07 [REDACTED]

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you may be aware [REDACTED] has been selected to be part of a study about young people's experiences of attending Alternative Provision settings. The project aims to find out what is already working well and what might be changed in the future to make this even better. The overall aims of the research are to find out:

- How young people describe the experience of joining Alternative Provision.
- What young people feel was helpful in their own transition.
- What can be done to make this transition more successful.

This will involve talking with myself for around 45 minutes about their thoughts and experiences.

The study is part of a Doctoral thesis at The University of Bristol and is legally and ethically obliged to comply with Data Protection legislation. The study has ethical approval from Bristol University and all information will be stored in line with this ethical guidance. The findings from the research will be presented in a Doctoral thesis and may later be used for journal articles or conference presentations. All data will be presented in such a way that your child will not be recognisable from the information given, all names and locations will be anonymised and changed.

If you are happy for your child to be involved, please sign the attached consent form. If your child later changes their mind and no longer wants to be involved in the study they will be able to opt out before participating in the interview.

If you have any questions about the research you can contact me by email or phone if you would like to find out more. [REDACTED] is also available to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Martineau
Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Bristol

Appendix 8 – Parental consent form



For office use only
ID Number:

Parental Consent form

Supporting young people's transition into Alternative Provision

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and they can change their mind about participating until completing an interview without giving any reasons.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I agree for my child to take part in a sound recorded interview.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that the information gathered during this research will be included in a report which will be submitted as part of a Doctoral thesis and may be used in future research or journal articles and training with educational professionals. I understand that my child's personal information will not be identifiable within these.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

Please initial boxes

Data Protection Act

I understand that the information given by my child in this study will be stored on the University data storage facility for 20 years and that any personal information will be made anonymous so that my child cannot be identified from the data. I understand that if my child discloses anything which the researcher believes is a safeguarding concern, this will be followed up in accordance with the provision's safeguarding policy. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing the information for the purpose of this study and possible future research within the University. My consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

Name (in block capitals) _____

Signature _____

Young person's name (in block capitals) _____

Date _____

Appendix 9 – Student information letter



Sarah Martineau
Norah Fry Research Centre
8 Priory Road
Bristol, BS8 1TX
sm15170@bristol.ac.uk

Dear Student,

My name is Sarah and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. As part of my training I am working on a project about young people's experiences of attending alternative provision settings and I would really like your help.

I would like to find out:

- Your thoughts on joining an alternative provision.
- What you found helpful when you first started.
- What else you think could have been done to make this better.

If you would like to be involved in the study this would involve talking with myself for around 45 minutes to one hour. This will be audio recorded and I will be the only person who listens to it. I will then use what you have told me and bring together ideas from lots of young people to help write up my research. Your name will be changed so that no one will know what you have said. I hope that the information you give me will be useful in helping to support other young people who start attending similar places in the future.

If you would like to help please tell [REDACTED], your key worker, and complete one of the "expression of interest forms". If you fill in the form and then change your mind, that is absolutely fine and you will not have to do the interview.

If you have any questions about the research I will be helping out at [REDACTED] over the next few weeks. Staff are also available to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Martineau
Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Bristol

Appendix 10 – Student consent form



For office use only
ID Number:

Student Consent form

Supporting young people's transition into Alternative Provision

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have been able to ask questions.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can change my mind about participating until the interview has been completed.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that my interview will be used to write a report for a thesis and may be used in future papers.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that the information given by me will be anonymised and kept securely and confidentially.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I know that information will only be shared, with my knowledge, should there be a cause for concern that I or someone else might have been harmed or is at risk of harm.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that I can stop the interview at any time and can ask for my interview to not be included until DATE.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

Data Protection Act

I understand that the information given by my child in this study will be stored on the University data storage facility for 20 years and that any personal information will be made anonymous so that my child cannot be identified from the data. I understand that if my child discloses anything which the researcher believes is a safeguarding concern, this will be followed up in accordance with the provision's safeguarding policy. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing the information for the purpose of this study and possible future research within the University. My consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

Name (in block capitals) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 11 – Staff information letter



Sarah Martineau
Norah Fry Research Centre
8 Priory Road
Bristol, BS8 1TX
sm15170@bristol.ac.uk

Dear Staff member,

My name is Sarah and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. As part of my training I am working on a project about young people's experiences of attending alternative provision settings and I would really like your help. I would like to find out about:

- Your experiences of supporting young people in their transition into alternative provision.
- What you do as a member of staff to support this transition, what you find helpful and why.
- What else you think could be done to improve the transition into alternative provision.

If you would like to be involved in the study this would involve taking part in two one-hour focus groups during staff meeting hours. These will be audio recorded and I will be the only person who listens to them. I will then use what you and the students have told me to bring together key themes and ideas about what supports transition into alternative provision. In the second focus group you will have the opportunity to think about this information and any changes you might like to make in your setting.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. The study is part of a Doctoral thesis at The University of Bristol and is legally and ethically obliged to comply with Data Protection legislation. The study has ethical approval from the University and all information will be stored in line with this ethical guidance. Potential limits of confidentiality and further information about how your data will be stored will be given should you decide to take part.

The findings will be presented in a Doctoral thesis and may later be used for journal articles or conference presentations.

If you think you might like to be involved, please complete the expression of interest form attached. I will collect these on DATE. Showing interest at this stage does not mean that you must take part. Consent forms will need to be signed prior to involvement in the focus group and you will be able to change your mind about involvement in the research until the time that the focus group begins. Once the focus group has taken place your data will not be able to be removed from the study.

If you have any questions about the research you can contact me by email or phone if you would like to find out more. If you would like to share your views, but would not feel comfortable doing this within a focus group setting please get in touch to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Martineau
Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of Bristol

Appendix 12 – Staff consent form



For office use only
ID Number:

Staff Consent form

Supporting young people's transition into Alternative Provision

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can change my mind about participating until the focus group begins. **I understand that once I have taken part in the focus group I will not be able to remove my data.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I agree for the focus group to be digitally recorded.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

I understand that the information gathered during this research will be included in a report which will be submitted as part of a Doctoral thesis and may be used in future research or journal articles and training with educational professionals. I understand that my personal information will not be identifiable within these.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	No

Data Protection Act

I understand that the information given by my child in this study will be stored on the University data storage facility for 20 years and that any personal information will be made anonymous so that my child cannot be identified from the data. I understand that if I disclose anything which the researcher believes is a safeguarding concern, this will be followed up in accordance with the provision's safeguarding policy. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing the information for the purpose of this study and possible future research within the University. My consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

Name (in block capitals) _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Appendix 13 – Student interview schedule

*Introduction – how has day been so far, what lesson missing etc.

"Thank you for coming to chat with me today and for being willing to talk about your own experiences. Before we start I will just go over the process again to make sure that you are still happy to participate. If you decide you don't want to, that is absolutely fine, you don't have to and if we start and then you change your mind we can stop immediately."

*Refer back to research information sheet and offer opportunity to ask questions.

"Ok so in terms of what we will be talking about I'm going to be asking you about your experience of moving here and what you found helpful. I want you to try and think about what went well and why, because if we can understand what helped you, hopefully we can use that to think about how we can help other young people. Towards the end of the interview I will then ask you about ways you think your experiences could have been better and how you think the move into places like [REDACTED] could be improved for other young people. Does that sound OK? Any questions?"

*If agree to participate ask to sign consent form and begin interview. Remind participant that they can stop discussion at any time without giving a reason.

Topic guide

Discovery Questions

- How long have you been here?
- Could you tell me about where you were before and your journey to being here now?
- How was the decision made?
- Could you tell me about your first day here?
- What were the best things about your first few days here?
- What did other people do to help you feel welcome here?
- How long did it take for you to settle in?
- What are your fondest memories of being here?
- What were some of the most helpful things that people did to help you in those first few days? Home? Staff? Other students?
- What are the most important things that happened to get you where you are today?
- What was it about you as a person that helped you to successfully move on to being here?
- How did you develop those qualities?
- What motivates you to stay here and make it a success?
- What are the best things about being here?
- What do you most value about being here? staff? Self? Students?
- What are you most proud of?
- Thinking back over your time here, what are your favourite memories?
- What are the most important things you have learnt since being here that you think will help you in the future?
- Can you tell me about how you have supported other students to settle in here?

Dream Questions

- What do you hope to do next?
- Do you feel prepared – what have people done to support you and make leaving easier?
- What else could be put in place to make leaving easier?
- If you worked here and a new student joined, what would you do to help them feel welcome?
- What 3 things would have made your move here even better?
- Who could have helped you and how?
- If you were going to give advice to your past self what would you say?
- If you were in charge of planning how students moved into [REDACTED] what would you do?

Appendix 14 – Phase 1 focus group schedule

*Reminder of research aims and structure. Recap information sheet and gather individual consent forms.

Before we start I will explain the appreciative inquiry process that we will be using in this research. Firstly, you will notice that we are focusing on what works well and your positive experiences. The reason for this is because research suggests that focusing on strengths is much more effective than concentrating on problems, if we can find out what works well we can do more of it. In the second half of the focus group I will then be asking about your hopes and aspirations for [REDACTED] in the future and this will help us to consider how the great work you are already doing can be built upon.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

“As a setting that is successful in meeting the needs of young people who had not been managing within mainstream or other settings, what do you think are the most effective and important things that you do when a young person first starts here?”

- What skills do you use?
- What is the most helpful information that you get from previous settings?
- How do you use that information most effectively?
- Can you describe a particularly successful transition, perhaps someone that you thought might not engage here but they did? What happened? What helped? How did you contribute?
- What does a typical transition look like, what are the best things that you as an organisation do to support that?
- What strategies do you put in place to help students thrive here?
- What difference have you been able to make as a staff team?
- What skills do you have as an individual/team to support young people?
- Encourage individual stories of success.

DREAM QUESTIONS

“Now I want you to think about your hopes for the future. Imagine 5 years from now [REDACTED] is an example of best practice within the country for alternative provision. Every child has a successful transition here and thrives during their time here. What has contributed most? What has changed? What has stayed the same?”

- What does a typical transition look like now?
- What goals do young people achieve in their time here?
- What systems and structures are in place to support this success?

Appendix 15 – Coding extract

Transcript extract (researcher speech in bold)	Initial coding
<p>I got kicked out of my old school umm they never told me why, it was mainly the fact that, well I was told they said they didn't know how to handle me when they were the ones that were annoying me, like little things, like they wouldn't let us smoke there and searching my bag for no reason and just harassing me for stuff like that, like I didn't carry anything like that on me, like they didn't realise that like the second we got in to school we went straight into the field and hid it in the woods so it was pointless searching us. It was just little things like that and then in the end getting in fights and pretty much just always been sat in the pastoral support office or getting kicked out or getting sent home. Like there was one point they said they was going to exclude me like they just couldn't have me in school, so it was just basically excluded and that was for about 4, 5 months I think.</p> <p>Wow that's a long time, what was that like? Not too bad too be fair, I got to play on my X-Box a lot. That was until they decided to send me here. but even then, like when I first started coming here my other school had to pay for it and obviously like I don't know who pays for it now but like they wouldn't pay for me to come here 11 til 4 or half nine til 20 past 2. They'd say like oh we can only afford like 4 hours so at first I started off doing one til four and then I got it swapped from 11 til 20 past 2 and then they actually said that they needed my place at the school coz it was an all boys school and they decided that they were going to get girls as well I don't know what coz that was just going to go horribly wrong coz they cant handle boys but yeah I got put on to roll so if they kick me out of here, that's it no other options</p> <p>Do you think that would ever happen? Possibly, not too sure I haven't really kicked off here. I've had up and downs but nothing compared to my old school And what is it about being here that helps with that not being able to kick off in a big way? It's just being in a small school and like pretty much everyone that comes here is just chill, like they're not all twats like in bigger schools and its just like I think the biggest group I've been in in here is about 5 people if that</p>	<p>Kicked out Not told/involved They Externalising control Rules, smoking Respect Fighting Pastoral support Kicked out</p> <p>They Not told/involved Finance Not told/involved Finance Timetabling/split timetable They Kicked out Last chance</p> <p>Behaviour Comparison with mainstream small groups Relationships</p>

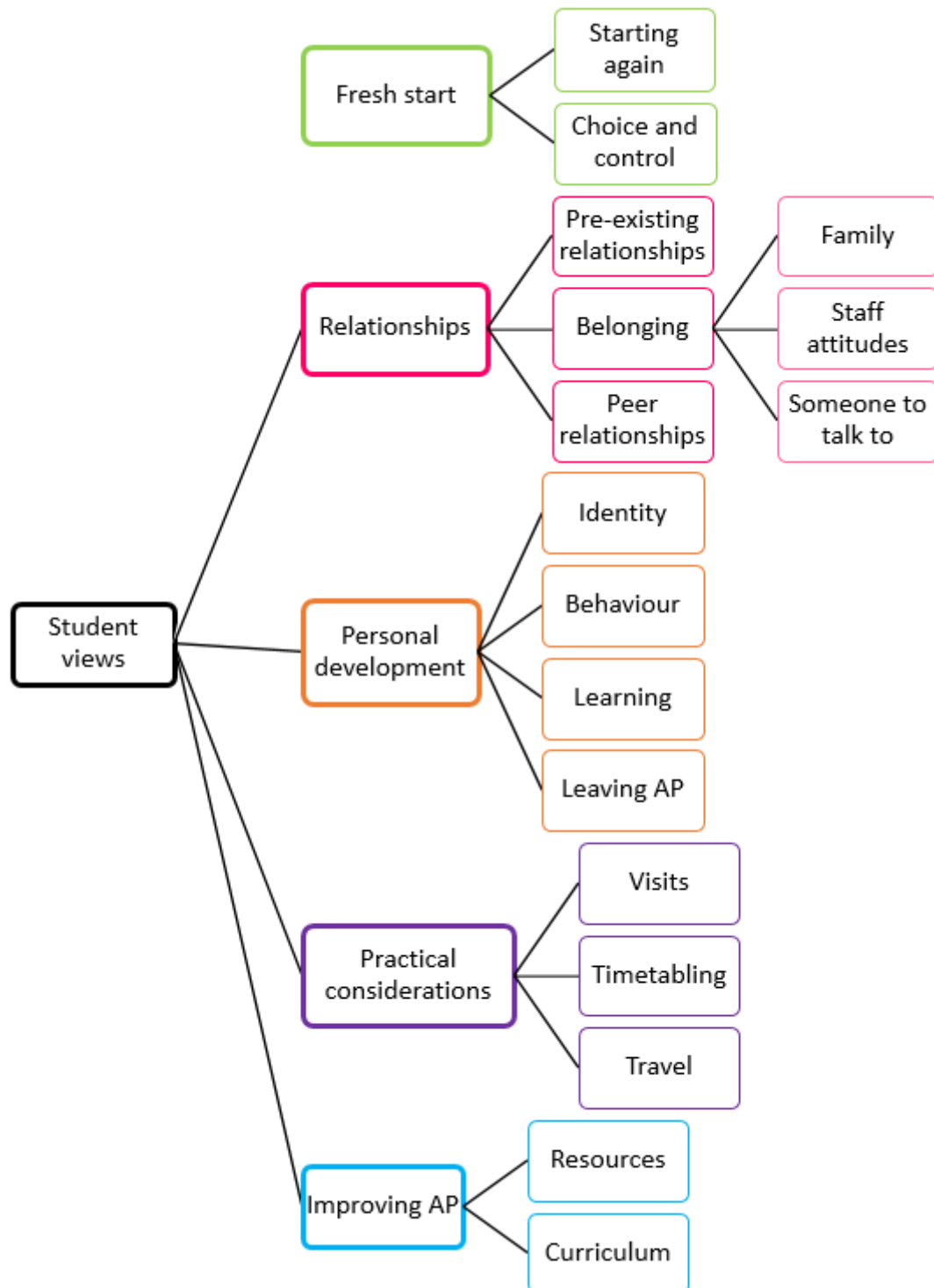
Appendix 16 – Coding examples relating to themes

Theme	Code examples	Theme Definition
A time for change	A fresh start Starting again Proving self Last chance Identity change Improving behaviour/learning	Transition into AP being seen as an opportunity for a new beginning.
"They decided to send me here"	They Kicked out Not told/involved Decision making	Decisions about attending AP were made by others. Students felt uninvolved in decision making.
Relationships	Friends Peers Staff Communication Connection Attachment Family Home Pre-existing relationships Isolated	Relationships, attachments and connections between students, staff, peers and others.
Induction and visits	Visit First day Meetings Sharing information	Experiences of induction visits to the AP, meetings about the placement and initial visits to the AP.
Flexible Rules	First name/Surname Informal Getting in trouble Smoking Comparison with mainstream Respect Maturity	The AP often had different rules compared to mainstream settings.
"Doing better"	Putting head down Improving behaviour and learning Understanding self Future goals Rewards and achievements	There was a sense of overall improvement during time in the AP.
"It took too long"	Start sooner Time out of education Previous placements Failure and rejection Early intervention Understanding need Funding/finances	It took a long time for students to reach the AP after several other placements and/or time out of education.
Resources	Furniture Buildings Environment Technology	Thoughts around the quality of equipment and the learning environment.
Curriculum	Qualifications Vocational Relevance Personal interests Person centred	The overall curriculum offered at the AP.

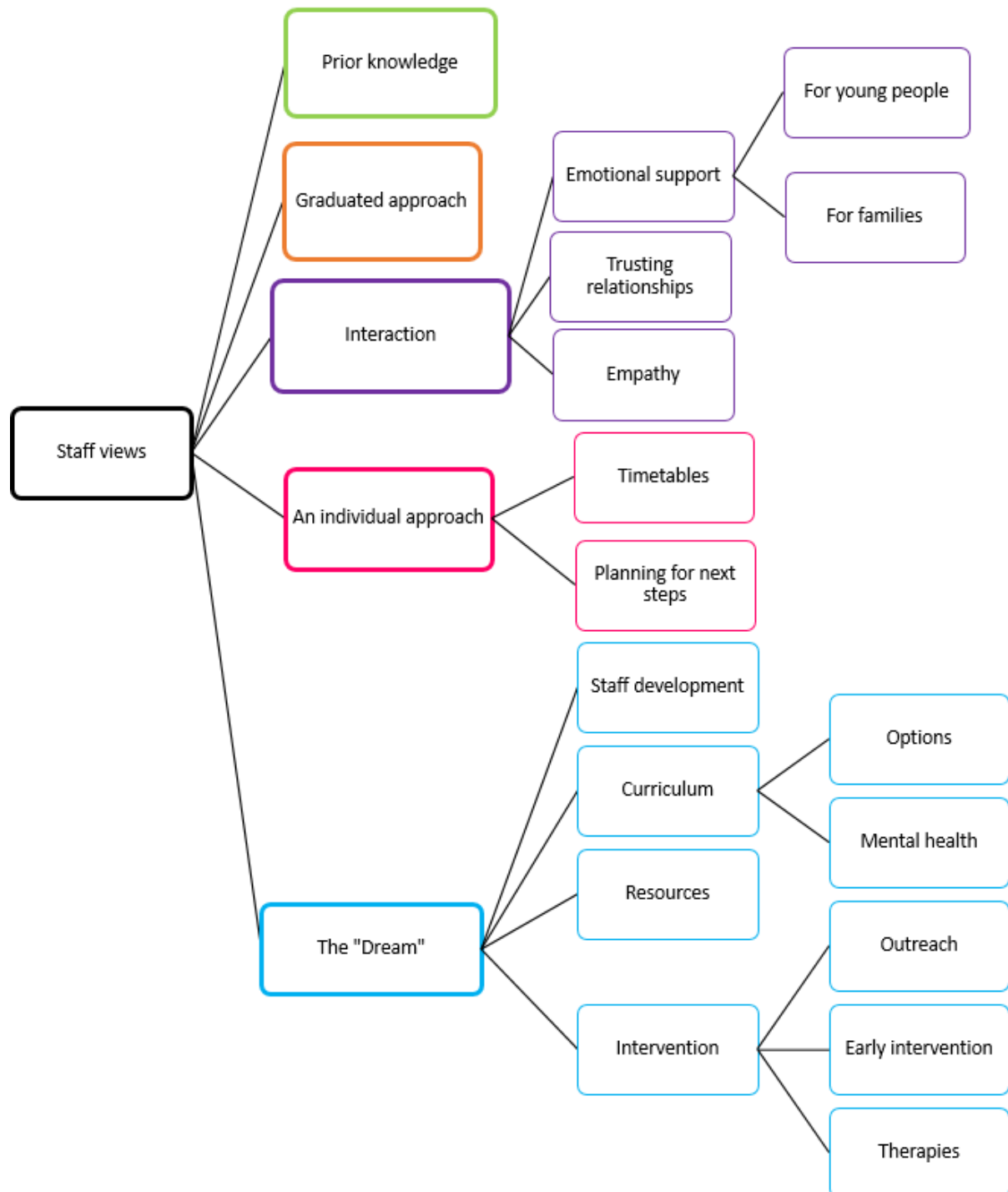
	Core subjects Life skills Specialist intervention Therapies	
Timetabling	Timetable Timings of day Structure/routine Person-centred planning	Opinions about how the day is structured within AP including timings of the day and individual timetables.
"I need more friends"	Friends Peers Isolation Comparison with mainstream	Relationships between peers in the AP compared with those in mainstream settings.
Staff development	Team work Relationships Skills Support	The importance of staff collaboration and development.

Appendix 17 – Progression of themes through thematic analysis

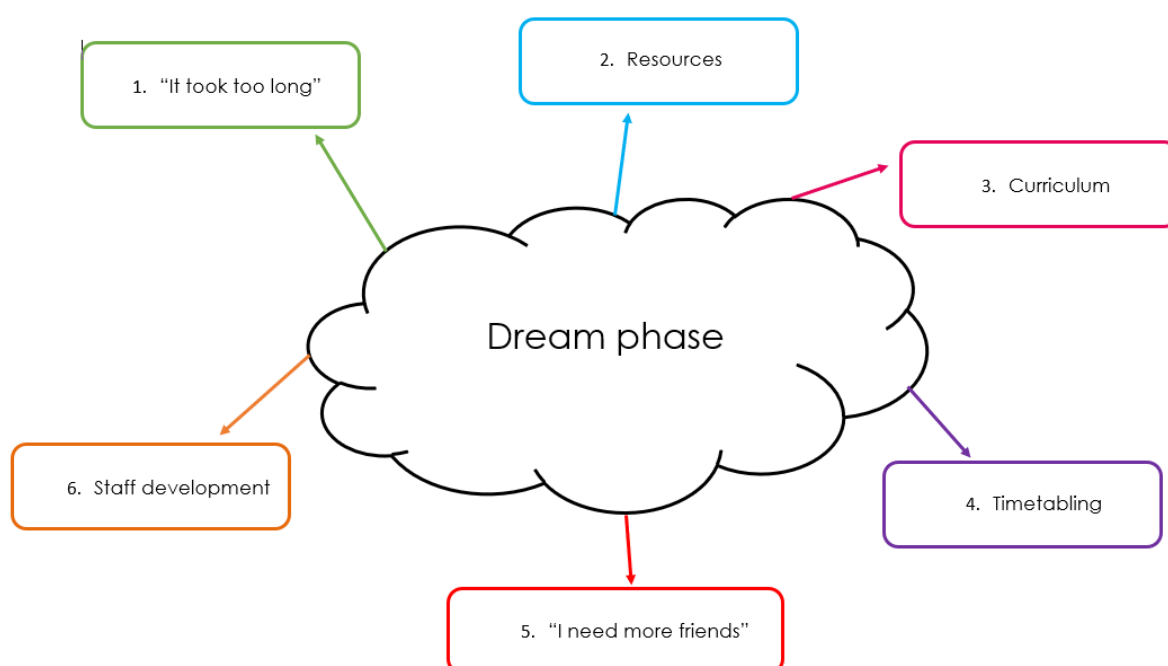
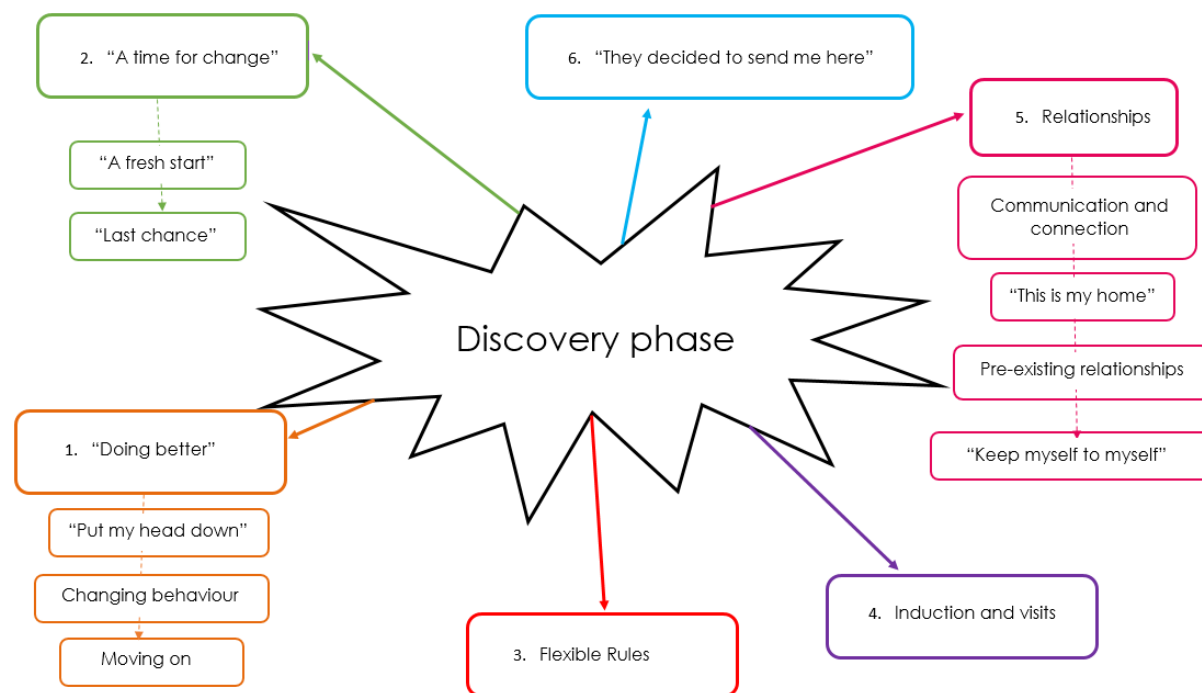
1. Thematic map showing themes and sub-themes generated from student interview data.



2. Thematic map showing themes and sub-themes generated from staff phase 1 focus group data.



3. Themes from initial separate thematic analysis of student and staff data, brought together to form the following thematic maps referring to the *Discovery* and *Dream* phases.



Appendix 18 – Ethics Approval



Beth Tarleton

Tue 27/06/2017, 10:52

Sarah Martineau ✉



Reply all | ▾

Dear Sarah

Thank you for responding so fully to the SPS REC's comments your study: *How can we support young people's transition into Alternative Provision?*

Please take this email as confirmation of ethical approval from the SPS REC. If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact Zaheda.

Please let me know if your research plan changes, you may need an amendment to your ethical approval

Good luck with your study

Beth

Appendix 19 – PowerPoint for phase 2 focus group

<p>An appreciative inquiry of transition into alternative provision</p> <p>Sarah Martinow Trainee SP University of Bristol</p>	<p>Reminder of the research</p> <p>To find out about young people's experiences of transition and how we can improve this for future new students.</p> <p>So far...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student interviews x8 • Phase 1 staff focus groups x2
<p>What is the research telling us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes from student and staff data. • How can you use this information? • What's next? 	<p>What is already happening?</p>
<p>A time for change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh start • Staff expectations/prior knowledge • Starting again with learning key skills • Identifying learning needs • Last chance - pressure 	<p>"They decided to send me here"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about decision making; Who? When? Where? • Hidden process? • Student voice
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and connection • Home/Family • Pre-existing relationships • Peer relationships in the AP 	<p>Induction and visits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical visits • Special food/drink • Physical contact/nurture • Keyworkers • Splitting time
<p>Relaxed Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform/smoking/swearing • Identity • Respect • Maturity • RELATIONSHIPS 	<p>"Doing better"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in learning and behaviour • Resilience and identity • Aspirations and hopes for the future

Appendix 20 – Background and critique of Attachment Theory

Since Bowlby (1969) first postulated the theory of mother-child attachments, attachment theory has influenced a wide range of intervention and research around emotional development (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004). Bowlby proposed that those who experience secure attachments with their primary care giver, perceive others to be responsive, helpful and available, enabling them to see themselves as valuable and lovable (Bowlby, 1980). This internal working model allows the child to “approach the world with confidence” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 208), seek help from others, and cope with difficult situations. Conversely, Bowlby proposed that those whose needs were not appropriately met by the caregiver, learned to see others as “comfortless and unpredictable” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 208) causing them to either avoid contact and interaction with others or to come into conflict with them.

The first empirical studies around this theory were conducted by Mary Ainsworth and colleagues through observations of the mother-child relationship (Ainsworth, Salter, & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Through experiments such as Ainsworth and Wittig's (1969) “Strange Situation”, typical secure attachment-style behaviours were identified, alongside two insecure attachment-styles. These were termed “anxious-ambivalent” and “anxious-avoidant”. A fourth insecure attachment style was later identified by Main and Solomon (1990), referred to as a “disorganised” attachment.

Attachment-styles have been criticised for ignoring individual differences and because there have been suggestions that internal working models, such as that suggested by Bowlby, are likely to develop and change over time (Cowan and Cowan, 2007). Studies such as the strange situation, have also been shown to have cultural biases. Rothbaum et al (2000) for example, found that different cultures have diverse views of maternal sensitivity. Furthermore, research suggests that infants form attachments with a range of people, extending beyond their primary care-giver, and that in as many as a third of cases, young people have been categorized as having a different attachment style with each parent (Furman and Simon, 2006). Focussing solely on a single relationship between care-giver and child also serves to disregard the role of other factors such as environmental and biological (Reuther, 2013). Because of this attachment theory has developed to include cognitive issues, genetic susceptibility, emotional regulation and temperament (Mercer, 2017).